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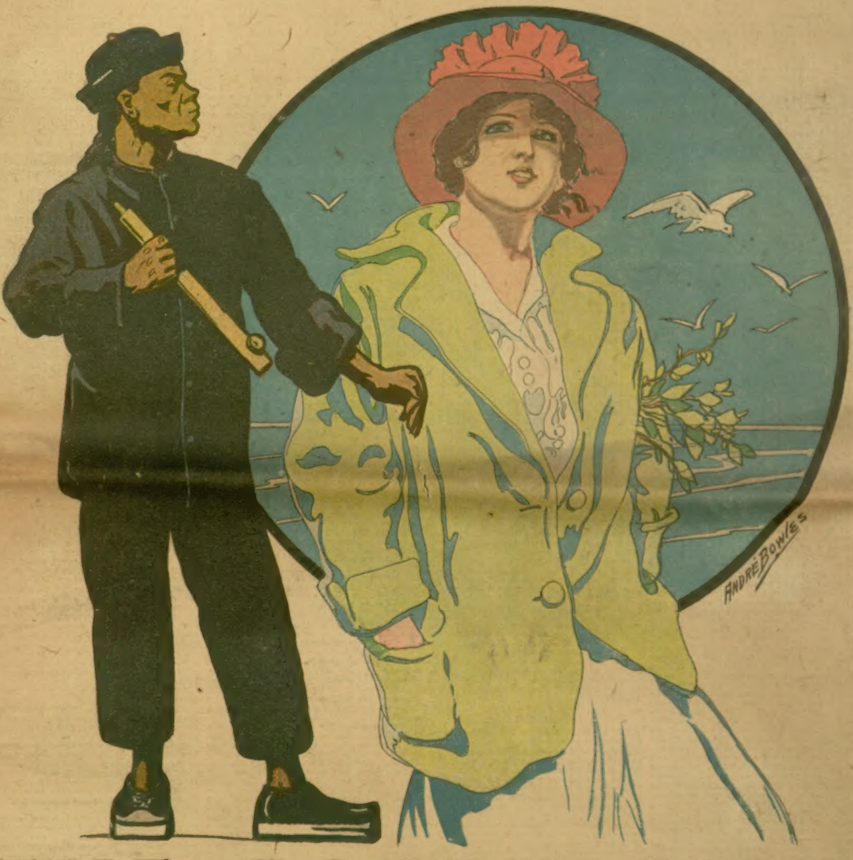

THE POPPY GIRL

Or, Daring the Bar Sinister -:- -:- By Carroll K. Michener

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CHAPTER I.

IT WAS at San Francisco's Cliff House that I first saw her. She stood at the parapet overlooking the Seal Rocks, watching the antics of the wallowing sea creatures. As she turned to go her eyes met mine for an instant, and opened for me the door of a new world—as, of course, eyes of women have been in the habit of doing since Eden.

A wide red hat crowned her jet hair, and brown eyes peered at me from under the edge of it. Her cheeks were of a rich oval, kissed into a delicate olive-tint by tropic suns that in bestowing favors show a scandalous partiality to brunettes.

She gave me the impression of a poppy—perhaps because of the red hat, tho I learned later that the opium poppy, of which I was thinking, is not red like the garden kind. So at first—until events made the title too subtly tragic—I called her the Poppy Girl.

That was my first picture of her. The second was etched for me on that evening in Chinatown when I began so unexpectedly and so melodramatically, the compilation of certain materials that were intended for a magazine article on opium smuggling.

I stumbled upon Chinatown unexpectedly. It was somewhere up in the Latin quarter, I knew, but I hadn't taken the pains to find out definitely. Halfway up a steep hill—so steep that the paving looked uncomfortable in its perilous incline—I stopped to catch my breath before a church. A bell began tolling in one of the spires, giving the dusk a peculiarly reposeful character.

"I must be a long way from Chinatown," I thought, and began to move on. But at that moment, as if in answer to the church bell, or in derision of it, the air was disturbed by the banging of a Chinese gong in a joss house scarcely a stone's throw from the church. Then I became aware of scurrying groups of exotic-looking children in a parked square facing the church, and of a few Chinese women who went past me and entered the edifice.

A little further on, around a corner, I walked into a yellow-lighted street in another country altogether. It was like stepping from reality into the pages of a book. This street was full of strange sounds, strange faces, strange smells; the shops displayed strange wares. I wandered up and down, up and down, fascinated.

In a greasy little Chinese restaurant I hesitated over pork chops or a chop suey, and chose the pork. It, too, was very greasy when it came to me—and greasy was the Chinese waiter. I regretted the enthusiasm that had kept me from returning to the hotel for dinner.

When I left the restaurant the banging of cymbals in the joss house had ceased. The streets were more crowded than in early evening. There were many Americans in the throng, most of them sightseers, I supposed, but for the most part the pedestrians were Chinese. Many of them wore American garb, but most of them shuffled in Chinese cloth shoes and slouched under shiny black jackets. There were a few Chinese women, skirtless, after the fashion of their sex among the lower classes, and children swarmed everywhere.

Driving down thru this chattering, aimless crowd, a big red sightseeing auto caught my attention. I watched the score of occupants descend and enter the joss house, from which presently came a renewal of the brassy banging. There was an enthusiasm in the din now that seemed to indicate the expectation of tourist largesse.

When they left the temple the hotel guide who had the party in tow led them across the street near where I stood and began a harangue.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I going to show you a rare sight. It is not often permitted for guides to conduct parties into an opium den. That used to be common enough, before the earthquake and fire, but no more. However, by special arrangement with the police and with the Chinese proprietor of this shop I am going to show you tonight a real Chinese opium hell, and 'hop fiends' lying in their bunks, stupefied by the terrible drug."

The fellow's blatant oratory made me skeptical, but he interested me. I was sorry that I was not a member of his party, and made a mental engagement to accompany him on the next evening. But he had finished, and his party, more that half of whom were women, were following him into the very building in which I had partaken of the uninviting pork chop.

The door of the restaurant, released too soon by one of the women who preceded her, flew shut in the face of a girl who was last in the line of sightseers. I sprang to open it for her and she darted a glance at me from under her hat brim, with a glint of a smile in it by way of thanks. I recognized the Poppy Girl—the girl of the Cliff House parapet who had watched the lazy seals. She returned my gaze momentarily, as if trying to determine if I was an acquaintance, and then went in to join the others.

For a minute or two I stood in the open door, hesitating over a feeling of being in very bad form, and then followed the tourists. They were tripping down a narrow, ill-lighted stairway at the rear of the restaurant. There were feminine shrieks enough at the somewhat adventurous narrowness and darkness—timorousness that was part pretended and part real. The guide had his little joke in store for them—what tourist guide is there who is not an appalling humorist? At the foot of the stairs he opened a door, with a great air of mystery, not upon an opium den, but upon the restaurant kitchen. From it came the pungent smell of Chinese cooking, and the grins of two or three very decollete Celestials, one of whom was plying a pair of chopsticks with great execution upon a bowl of rice.

The guide led the party into the kitchen, out thru a door, and down another dark staircase, at the foot of which he paused before a low, screened window. He knocked two or three times, each time more loudly, until at last a bleared face was pressed against the screen from within.

"Light, Charlie," demanded the guide. "What for no light?"

The apparition grunted and shuffled away, but presently from behind the screened window came a yellow glow, and the guide motioned his flock to peer thru the aperture.

"Fake stuff," muttered a man who stood beside me. "I might have known the police wouldn't permit anything of this sort—the real thing, I mean. You can see it's a frame-up to catch the tourists."

I said nothing, but took my turn at the window. The interior was yellow with smoke. I could make out dimly that it was a small room, with no furnishings save a double tier of wooden bunks on two sides. The bunks were occupied. There were three or four men visible, all but one of them apparently asleep. This one, nearest the window, propping himself on one elbow, was reaching for a long-stemmed pipe held for him by the attendant. He took one long puff and then sank back limply, with a smile on his lips but with an expression of the utmost vacuity.

As I turned away the man who had spoken to me before said:

"It looks genuine enough, but it must be a fake. I tell you they wouldn't allow anything of the sort now—haven't allowed it since the earthquake. That destroyed the old Chinese city, you know, the old underground city that every one has read so much about."

He shrugged his shoulders as he turned to follow the crowd of tourists up the stairway.

"Oh, in the old days," he continued, "it was easy enough to see real opium dens. There was an underground city full of them; and underground passages leading down to the Bay. No telling how many chaps went out that way—never to be heard of again; and robberies, and white slavery—well, you wouldn't have wanted women-folks of yours trailing thru the Chinese city in those days, even with a squad of police as protectors."

The last of the tourist party had filed up the stairway, but I stood in front of the screened window for another glimpse of the strange interior. As I looked, the face of the Chinese attendant who had answered the guide's knock appeared behind the screen, the eyes leering dully at me and the mouth fixed in an expression of utter stupidity. The sight of that face both revolted and fascinated me. I had the impulse to go—to run pell-mell up the stairs and out into the open air of the street—but I had a stronger impulse to stay. I believe I felt rather than heard the door leading to the stairway close behind me. My heart began to beat faster as the thought flashed into mind—an absurd thought—that I was being trapped, perhaps to be robbed, perhaps to be——

The eyes of the Chinese leered more insolently. I seemed to observe in them the triumphant look of a beast of prey who has a victim within clutch. Slowly and with real terror I began to back toward the closed door, but I couldn't shake my gaze from those yellow, gloating eyes behind the screen.

I reached the door and felt for the knob. My hand ran up and down the panels, confidently at first, and then in a panic. There was no knob! I pushed at the door, threw my whole weight against it, but it would not yield.

For a moment I had the impulse to shout—I think I tried to shout—but the eyes held me, congealed the sound of my voice. Then I grew suddenly more calm. What good would it do, after all, to shout? The tourist party was gone, undoubtedly beyond hearing, and in what way would it edify the opium sleepers within or the proprietors without for me to make outcry?

A strange sense of humor came over me. It struck me as ridiculous, this situation. I could not be a hundred feet from the street where men walked in security—not much more than a stone's throw from the great hotel on the hill from which I had set forth only a few hours before, a-sightseeing. And above all else this was the twentieth century—I was in America! Preposterous that I could be trapped in a Chinese opium den and that a slant-eyed Celestial behind a dim screen could do me harm.

I turned to the door again, pushed at it, beat it, kicked it, but it defied me. I stood motionless, listening for some answering step on the other side, but in the stillness that followed I could hear only my racing pulse beats.

Then, breaking the silence as with the abrupt shock of nightmare, I heard a woman shriek, once, twice, piercingly—in the accent of one who looks upon a thing of horror.

CHAPTER II.

FOR a moment I felt like one who is rudely roused from a bad dream. This feeling was followed almost instantly by the realization that it was no dream, and that the situation demanded action.

The face at the screen was gone, and I poked my fists thru the wire mesh. They were cut nastily by the time I had torn the screen away sufficiently to make room for my body.

A pair of eyes leered at me out of the semi-darkness of one of the bunks as I squeezed thru the aperture and dropped to my feet in the sleepers' room. I turned away from them and began to search for a door, a stair—any way to get out. Upon the side, at right angles to the window thru which I had entered, there were no bunks. I felt my way along the wall in the semi-darkness, groping for the panels of a doorway, but I found no opening save another screened window. Beyond it I could see no light, but as I pressed my face close to the screen, holding my breath to listen, I heard the sound of respiration that seemed almost at my ear.

Thinking to avoid the scrutiny of a pair of eyes that could see me without my being able to see them, I drew away from the window and leaned against the wall at one side of it. The wall surprised me by seeming to recede from the pressure of my body! Concluding that I was knee-shaky and reeling from the experience, I leaned harder against the wall, with the result that it gave way suddenly like a swinging door, and sent me staggering across a threshold into another room.

A creature sinuous and thin-garbed flung himself upon me and pinioned my arms as in a vise. I struggled to free myself, but ceased upon making a discovery that set me shuddering. The creature, playing with me with his strength, kept my hands vised in but a single one of his, and with the other pressed a short, flat blade across my cheek. There was a peculiar hiss of triumph from his lips as he felt my resistance die under the influence of that chill steel.

I was becoming accustomed to the darkness, and what at first had seemed total void now showed dim outlines. From the room beyond the screened window came a faint light, and outlined against it I noticed for the first time the head and bust of another person. I looked closer and saw that it was the figure of a woman. She stood tense and straight as a cataleptic, looking as if her eyes were fixed immovably upon an object of fascination. I followed the direction of her gaze, and made out in the half-light of the other room, in a tier of bunks that had not been visible from the other screen, a face utterly different from those of the other sleepers. It was the face of a white man, drawn, haggard, gray to the point almost of slatiness, eyes open but gazing at nothing, stupid, yet reflecting the impression of visioning great and beautiful things.

I began to make out more clearly the lines of the woman's head and shoulders. There was something familiar about them, and my pulse quickened under the impression.

The creature holding me imprisoned seemed to sense my interest in the woman, and released me, tho at the same time keeping the sharp blade of his knife pressed against my body. I stepped forward and touched the girl's shoulder. I felt her shudder at the contact. The next instant, even before she turned her face fully toward me, I recognized in her the Poppy Girl.

As her eyes met mine, at first half seeing, half focused, as of one who visions dazedly after awakening from a sleep of exhaustion, her lips parted and she uttered a cry—a sort of stifled echo of the shriek I had heard from the other room. Then, quite simply, as a frightened child seeking paternal refuge, her arms sought my shoulders, her body swayed against mine; a trembling seized her and she would have slipped to the floor from her weak clasp had I not caught her and held her.

So little time had elapsed since that first shriek from the darkness—it had been so much of an episode of "flashes"—that I had had no time for reflection, no opportunity to question her presence there. I was given none now, for at that instant a sound of commotion in a distant part of the house, a tramping of hurried feet, and the utterance of excited voices, came to our ears. The sounds gave perturbation to the Chinese attendant. He listened a moment, moved away a short distance into a shadowed portion of the room, and then returned, motioning to me to follow. I tried to set the girl on her feet, but she was a dead weight in my arms. With the Chinese pulling excitedly at me and in sharp tones urging haste, I picked up the girl and staggered across the room to where a door stood open in the shadows. A whiff of damp, stagnant air warned me that I was at the top of a stairway. I hesitated, resisting the haste of the Chinese, who would have pushed me across the threshold with the leverage of the door he sought to close against me. The footsteps and the sound of voices were louder now. I would have shouted had not that blade of steel been pressing always against me. But with a sudden resolution the Chinese changed his mind. There was fear now in his urgency to be rid of me. He half dragged me with my burden to another door, and with his great strength hurled me thru it.

We were outside the house now, tho I could see nothing. A current of fresh air flowed over us from somewhere like a benediction, and under its influence the girl revived. I searched my pockets for matches, but as luck would have it found only one. Sheltering the flame with both hands, I made it serve as a torch to explore the surroundings. Its feeble light discovered a deep passageway that somewhere must have been open to the night. Doors faced onto this passage from a number of houses similar to one we had left—or the same one; I could not tell. At the end of the long passage there was also a door. Behind that, I thought, must be stairs. When the match had burned out I walked slowly, with the girl, toward that door. It opened outward, and exploring with my feet I found steps.

CHAPTER III.

FOR a long time we sat, without speaking, on a seat in a public square. We were going thru a mental process similar to the physical one of regaining breath after a footrace. The clang of a police patrol roused us.

"I must report to them," I said, jumping up. "They're looking for you, of course—probably turning the place inside out."

But the girl, startled, stood up, too, putting out a restraining hand.

"No!" she cried, with a frightened emphasis. "Please don't."

"Why?" I asked.

"Oh, you wouldn't understand. I couldn't tell you. Take me home, please—to the hotel."

I managed to hail a taxi a block or two away, and put her in it.

"I don't want you to misunderstand me," she explained, when we had started. "About not reporting to the police, I mean. That was not for my sake. It was——"

"To protect some one," I suggested as she hesitated, and she nodded.

"They couldn't have missed you at once—it was some time before there was any sign of the party returning to look for you. It was odd that your——"

"My chaperone?" she laughed, constrainedly. "Oh, I suppose I'm in terrible disgrace. I came without one. You see, father has an old friend, a lady who takes care of me when I come to San Francisco. She was to have come with me tonight, but at the last moment she managed to get a convenient headache—she detests touring expeditions of this sort. But I've never seen Chinatown before—I wanted to get a glimpse of what they call the 'night life.' Father never goes places with me. This is the first trip to the coast ne has let me make with him. He had to be off to some directors' meeting or other tonight, he said. So I decided to do as I pleased—I just came along with the rest of the tourists. There were plenty of ladies in the party. It was all right, don't you think?"

I laughed. "It would have been all right if you hadn't gone and got shanghaied, as it were, in an opium den!"

"Oh—yes," she pouted. "But, after all, it was quite an adventure. Didn't—don't you like it? You're not so gallant as the heroes in the story books. But probably you don't approve of me. Perhaps you're one of those prim persons who don't think a girl can do anything—alone?"

"Oh, yes, I do, and no, I'm not," I protested, answering both of her allegations at once. "I approve of you a good deal more than it would be proper to tell you on so short an acquaintance."

After which, of course, she considered it expedient to change the subject.

"Did you ever take ether?" she asked. I shook my head and she continued: "That's how I feel—just as if I had come out from under the influence of it. I don't know exactly how things happened. The last I remember clearly was taking my turn at the little screened window. The opium odor seemed to be very familiar—so familiar as to delight me, at the same time that it filled me with a sort of sickness. There must be something—about me. Do you believe in heredity?"

She looked at me anxiously, with parted lips, as I nodded. "Yes, to a certain extent. Why?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter. I do, myself, but I don't suppose that's it—that can't be. I have a faint remembrance of the sensation of a wall giving way before me, and of staggering after it; of being frightened—petrified, really—so that I couldn't utter a sound, tho every nerve in me kept telegraphing to my brain to shriek for help. I felt the presence of some one in the room—a loathsome presence, catlike, for it moved about me with felt-muffled footfalls.

"I don't know how long I stood there, but presently I became aware of another screened window from which a faint light shone. Objects began to stand out more clearly as my eyes became accustomed to the half-dark, and suddenly I found myself gazing thru that screen upon a face, a gray, waxy—no, slaty—face with the eyes half open—terrible!"

She hid her face in her arms for a moment as if to shut out the memory.

"I think I screamed," she resumed at length.

"Yes," I assented grimly, "I believe you did."

"It was that face. "Oh," seeming to forget me in addressing an invisible presence, "if it really had been yours—if it had been you!"

There still was a frightened pallor in her cheeks as I said good night to her in the hotel lobby.

"Has father returned?" she asked the clerk on duty, as I turned to go.

"He telephoned a message to you that he would be very late in returning," the clerk answered.

I fancied her cheeks wore even a deeper pallor as she gave me her hand again, and then walked in a dispirited manner down the long lobby corridor to the elevators.

CHAPTER IV.

AZELIE was not seasick, tho most of the passengers succumbed ten minutes after leaving the Golden Gate, and many did not reappear until two or three days later. I should have expected the Poppy Girl not to be seasick—she whose childhood was spent among coral strands. There was the patent of the sea in her clear eyes—the sun's escutcheon of open-air nobility stamped indelibly in her soft, olive skin. She was not the sort of girl one imagines to be a prey to the petty ills of humanity. She was to me a superior creature, a sort of Neptune's daughter.

We spent long hours together on the wind and wave lashed decks. She had a keen delight in breasting a hurricane or in standing against a hail of chilled spray.

We spoke little of San Francisco and never of the opium den. It was not a pleasant remembrance—neither that nor the aftermath of police investigations and explanations, and of gossip-babbling among the curiosity-consumed tourist party. Nor was it necessary to speak of the somewhat ridiculously obvious coincidence of my sailing on the Far Eastern opium-smuggling mission on precisely the ship Azelie chose!

I don't know whether it was jealousy or a more subtle instinct that made me from the first dislike the purser. He was a young man and not unhandsome. Unquestionably he enjoyed a certain popularity with his passengers. But for me there was in him a well-defined villainy. Tho there was very little save the intuitive upon which to base dislike, the dislike persisted and grew into suspicion.

I was sitting one day in the smoking-room, idling over the pages of a work on poppy-growing in India—in reality only killing time until Azelie should pass the porthole before which I sat, on her before-tiffin promenade. Over the top of the book I saw the purser enter with a man I had not seen before on the trip, a man wan and unwholesome. The mal de mer, I thought, must have been heavy upon him. There was something reminiscent in his features, but I could not identify them. I dismissed the fancy as one of the innumerable ones that puzzle persons who have traveled much and carry in memory a great library of half-remembered faces.

They sat near me and conversed for some time in voices too low-pitched to reach my ears. But at length the purser rose and I heard him say:

"Winter, I want you to do me a favor."

"Well?" queried the older man.

"I want you to invite me out to your house. Now—now, wait a minute. They say you've a beautiful place out there at the Beach, one of the prettiest in Honolulu. I've been making that port—well, you know how long—and you've never yet done me the honor to have me out there."

The older man eyed the purser sharply, with a note of suspicion.

"What do you want, Jepson?" he queried. "What's your game?"

"I guess you 'get' me all right," wagged the purser, planting himself stolidly in front of the other and nodding his head slowly.

"Jepson," said the older man, graying a bit under a sudden flash of temper, "I want you to let that daughter of mine alone."

The purser said nothing, but held his attitude of insolent confidence.

"Winter," was his sneering reminder, "you know what a dozen words from me would do to you, don't you?"

"They'd do the same thing to you at the same time."

"But you've a d—d sight more to lose. Don't be a fool, Winter." And the purser strode out on deck, humming a dance tune insolently.

Over the top of the book I surveyed the other man, who sat staring rather impotently after the departed purser. It did not occur to me to appraise him as Azelie's father, for the realization of that fact had come to me more or less subconsciously. The truth did not strike me fully until Azelie called us both from the smoking-room, and after an introduction began promenading us vigorously up and down the deck. I was not too affable when the purser joined us, nor did my affability increase when he pirated Azelie from us to take her on an expedition to the forecastle, where, he averred, dwelt the ship's cat, a buccaneering, Captain Kidd feline of the blackest dye. Her father pleaded lack of sea-legs, and Azelie bade me remain to entertain him.

Azelie and the purser were much together for the remainder of the voyage, despite my studied contrivances. Altho I probably would not have admitted it, I was jealous. I felt a sort of proprietorship over her that grew out of our adventure in the opium den. I was not in love with her, I told myself—if I went so far as to consider the question of love at all. In love? I who, as Kipling puts it, had seen so much of "the others" that I was firmly convinced I should never "settle to one"? Nevertheless I was consciously and unreasonably jealous.

There was a ship's ball on the last night of the trip. We were approaching slowly the channel between Oahu and Maui, the ship's speed being timed so as to bring us into Honolulu at daybreak. The passengers, between dances, amused themselves with vain efforts to "pick up" the light on Makapu Point.

I captured Azelie from a youth who had danced with her twice and showed symptoms of a desire to create a monopoly.

"I've been dancing too hard; let me rest a bit," she said to me gratefully.

So we walked aft, aloof from the music and the lights, and gazed for a long time into the phosphorescent glow of the vessel's wake. Sometime within the past day or two we had crossed an invisible line from the cold Pacific area bordering the American continent into the mellifluent atmosphere of the tropic isles. It was impossible not to sense the languor of the atmosphere even in the freshness of the ocean breezes. The Poppy Girl seemed to me to be approaching her own element. Her dark hair was but a reflection of the black star-dome above the ocean world. Her olive cheeks suggested the caress of moon-shot breezes drenched in the fragrance of tropic flowers. Her eyes had depths that flashed as passionately as the ocean's phosphorescence.

"Azelie," I said, "you are a child of the tropics."

"Of course," she answered. "I was born there."

"You are a tropical flower."

"And you are becoming emotional," she laughed.

"Being a tropical flower," I persisted, "would you wither away and droop on your stem if you were to be dug up and transplanted to a land of snow?"

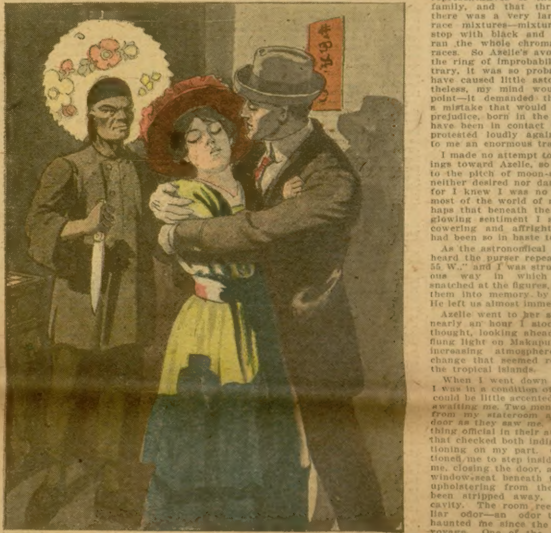
"You are talking nonsense," she parried. "In the first place, I am not a flower; in the second place, where is the gardener to do the digging?"

I would have interrupted, but she forbade it.

"Moreover," she continued, "you have never seen me in my garden—if you will have it that I am a flower. Perhaps you would not like me there."

"No matter where a rose grows," I philosophized, "it is composed of the same fiber and exhales the same fragrance."

"You are very poetical," she pouted, "and I don't think you quite see my point. What I'm trying to tell you is difficult—it is difficult for me to tell and for you to understand. I don't think I'll try."



She would have slipped to the floor.

She rested her elbows on the rail and looked to the southward.

"Over there—fifty miles or so—is a bit of our paradise," she said to me, softly. "It is Hawaii, the biggest of the islands. I love it for a special reason—my old granny's cottage is there, in a cluster of palms facing the sea."

"Your grandmother?" I asked.

"Yes. You see, that's part of the many things I must tell you."

"There is nothing you must tell me, Azelie," I protested. "I ask you to tell nothing."

"Spoken like a—a hero, in the story books," she derided.

"Spoken like a lover," I had it in mind to say, but when it comes to using the little four-lettered word in any of its forms I am as shy as a schoolboy. So I stood in silence. A wisp or two of her hair, escaping from under the queer, lacy Spanish shawl that covered her head, was blown across my cheek by the softening breeze. The combination of sea and sky of the tropics, with this glorious tropic creature beside me, gave me suddenly the impetuosity of a troubadour. The little four-lettered word no longer seemed forbidding, and I used it prodigally, in speech the text of which I have no remembrance. Casual phrases, I suppose, are more likely to cling to the memory than those that belong to emotional climaxes.

Azelie faced me with a mingled expression of surprise and indecision—like one who has been prepared for an event, yet in the face of it forgets the decision as to how it shall be met.

My storm of declaration having passed, I abandoned words for action—triumphant over a light in her eyes that I took for capitulation. But she would not suffer me to touch her.

"I must tell you now—I must make you understand."

She seemed fortifying herself for some great effort at the repression of emotion and the conquering of reluctance to perform an act of unpleasantness. Placing a hand on my arm she drew herself up to her full height, facing me. For a moment she stood looking into my eyes with the expression of one who stargazes, reading self-doom.

"Look at me," she commanded at last. "Am I white—like other women?"

I was filled with a sudden chill at the suggestion in her voice—then my pulse began to race, madly and unsteadily.

"What do you mean?" I asked. Yet there was no need to ask—no need to explain.

"You think I am white," she went on mercilessly. "I look white—I am white, in manners, in education, in experience, in associations, in instincts, in complexion—in everything except in blood."

She paused a moment, open-mouthed, swallowing nervously as the only manifestation of her repressed emotion, watching to see the effect upon me of her pronouncement. But for me the shock of it was over, and there was no verdict in my eyes for her to read.

"I am hapa-haole—one of those handsome half-caste Hawaiian girls you've heard tourists speak about. I'm a melting-pot product."

She laughed in a voice suggesting hysteria, and then was tensely calm again.

"There's the blood of the Polynesians in my veins—the blood of black men. Oh, I'm not ashamed of it! I'm proud—proud! But pride doesn't save me. Among my own people—among my own islands—my blood is of no consequence. Yes, it is—it is the white blood in me that with them blemishes! But with you—in the United States—I am half-breed—I am part nigger!"

The bitterness in her voice and the crescendo with which she finished speaking, leaving her swaying before me, tense with the passion of her self-betrayal, held me aloof for a moment, tho I was filled with a desire to disclaim, to refute, to reassure. Then the storm in her passed and left her trembling and pitiful, a bundle of womanhood that swayed straight toward my arms.

"No," she protested, weakly. "No," as I tried to coax her face upward from my shoulder. I let her sob until she was quiet. Then I began speaking. But she put her fingers across my lips and would not let me go on.

We stood apart, silently, reading each other's eyes, when the purser found us.

"Aha!" he exclaimed. "Here she is! Here is the young woman who asked for a reading of the ship's position by starlight; and it requires the whole ship's crew to find her when the hour appointed for the ceremony has arrived!"

I could have strangled him.

CHAPTER V.

AZELIE'S father joined us on the upper deck, where the second officer and the purser explained to her the mystery of navigation by the stars, taking much longer to do it by far than I considered necessary. While they talked I stood with her father, for the most part silent or conversing only in monosyllables. I wanted to speak of Azelie—to bring up for his confirmation or denial the story she had told me of her birth. I felt somehow that there must be a denial of it. The idea of there being in her a bar sinister seemed too preposterous for belief. That I was not more affected—not, indeed, overwhelmed by her disclosures—was due, no doubt, to the skepticism with which I persisted in viewing what she had told me.

I had read often that many of the old Hawaiian residents—the sons and grandsons of the first missionaries and planters from England and America—were quite frankly and proudly connected with the best of the Hawaiian community. I knew that white blood flowed freely in the veins of many of the later representatives of the Hawaiian royal family, and that thruout the islands there was a very large population of race mixtures—mixtures that did not stop with black and white but which ran the whole chromatic scale of the races. So Azelie's avowal did not have the ring of improbability. On the contrary, it was so probable that it need have caused little astonishment. Nevertheless, my mind would not yield the point—it demanded the uncovering of a mistake that would set it right. My prejudice, born in the white races who have been in contact with the colored, protested loudly against what seemed to me an enormous tragedy.

I made no attempt to analyze my feelings toward Azelie, so recently brought to the pitch of moon-struck avowal. I neither desired nor dared such analysis, for I knew I was no less human than most of the world of men; I knew perhaps that beneath the skin of my still glowing sentiment I should find but a cowering and affrighted figure that I had been so in haste to christen Love.

As the astronomical party broke up, I heard the purser repeat, "21 51 N., 156 55 W.," and I was struck with the curious way in which Azelie's father snatched at the figures, seeming to stamp them into memory by eager repetition. He left us almost immediately.

Azelie went to her stateroom, and for nearly an hour I stood, in a chaos of thought, looking ahead toward the far-flung light on Makapu, and sensing the increasing atmosphere of indefinable change that seemed reaching out from the tropical islands.

When I went down to my stateroom I was in a condition of melancholia that could be little accented by the final blow awaiting me. Two men had just emerged from my stateroom and halted at the door as they saw me. There was something official in their attitude, something that checked both indignation and questioning on my part. One of them motioned me to step inside. They followed me, closing the door, and pointed to the window-seat beneath the porthole. The upholstering from the back of it had been stripped away, baring a narrow cavity. The room reeked with a peculiar odor—an odor that had faintly haunted me since the beginning of the voyage. One of the men picked up a small, oddly shaped tin. It had been sealed, but recently opened, and from it came the odor that puzzled me. Under the influence of it a picture flashed thru my mind and gave answer to my perplexity. I was once more in the underground opium den in San Francisco, looking into a pair of leering Oriental eyes, and sensing the chilling terror of a woman's shriek.

"You overlooked this tin," came the voice of one of the men thru the midst of this mental re-vision. "Or rather," he continued, "your confederate did. He must have been in a hurry—must have 'got wise' to us."

"I don't understand you," was the best I could do by way of response. My visitors smiled.

"No, that's right, don't talk," the spokesman advised. "'Remember that anything you say may be used against you,' etc. But what we want just now is your confederate. We want the man who was in this room not twenty minutes before we got here, and dumped the 'dope' overboard."

I could do nothing but gaze at them in astonishment.

"Come, now," the spokesman urged. "A little tip from you won't be forgotten when you come to trial. It won't be forgotten when it comes to the way we'll deal with you before you're tried."

"Gentlemen," I said at last, finding my voice. "You have made a mistake. I know nothing of any confederate, and I am absolutely ignorant as to how this—this 'dope' as you call it—happens to be in my stateroom."

They gave up questioning me, and one of them went to summon the captain. When the master of the ship stood before me he was frankly astonished.

"I understood you were an author," he laughed, "but these gentlemen from the Government Secret Service Department tell me you are an opium smuggler!"

A sense of the humor of the situation

(Continued on Page 1[illegible])

The Film Impostor

Or, Starring in the Dark

By P. G. Estee

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CHAPTER IV.

TIME flew by, and every day found Donegan more in love with his work and—this he did not admit to himself—more in love with brown-eyed Thea Burling, who gave him no encouragement whatever, and sometimes seemed positively to fear him.

Just what the New York office would say when they found the forbidden name on their pay roll Mr. Richardson did not know, and he did not care now. Her work pleased him and the pictures were good. That was sufficient for the present. Indeed, so well did the demure girl do in light comedy parts that the director had ordered one-reel comedy scenarios prepared for Thea and Billy Lamb.

Donegan's cheerful smile was in evidence one morning as he came in early and handed Roberta an opened letter. Mailed some time before at Portland, Oregon, it had gone to Bluefield, then Chicago, and finally to Spokane. Miss Springly's hands trembled as she drew out the inclosure. Even the nervous, shaky hand of a broken man could not conceal that man's identity from the eyes of love.

There was no date line, and the scrawl started with the words:

> "Dear Lonny:—I know you hate me and will kill me if you get a chance. I don't blame you. I don't know why I treated you as I did. I could tell you how a man encouraged me in buying options; led me in deeper and deeper, and finally started me on the drug route, but that is no excuse. If I had been a man he could not have done it.
>
> "I am going to become a man yet, and then I will live on crusts and scrub floors but what the money shall be made up to you. Have just heard of the foreclosure. I did not make that mortgage—at least, not while I was in my senses. Perhaps I signed it while stupid with drugs. I could not swear, but I received no money.
>
> "Lon, old pal, do as you wish with me when we meet, but remember I am trying harder than I ever tried in my life. DICK."

At the bottom a line had been added:

> "The man is coming West soon. I am ready for him."

Donegan had shuddered at the sinister weight of that line. The girl drew in her breath with a gasp.

"If we only knew that man. He must be punished and terribly, but not as poor Dick plans. You must save Dick from that. You will try, Lon. See, I am calling you by the name your friend called you."

"I loved my friend," he said simply. "I am happy this morning that I have found he is to be charged with nothing more serious than weakness. I have already started a search for Dick in several cities. Trust me, Robbie."

"Another week and the Blue Trophy will be completed and you will have made a name all your own," said Roberta, as later they stood waiting for the call to go on in one of the drawing-room scenes at the studio.

"It's 'fess up then for me," said Donegan, slowly. "I must not let them give Handerston's name to the public. That would lead to trouble for the La Paz. Richardson has been a prince. Do you think he has ever suspected?"

"No, and I think your sentence after confession will be to sign a contract in your own name. This play is a big thing for the La Paz."

"It's your work and that of the others more than mine that has made it so. I only wish it were true about the contract, however, for these six weeks have been the happiest of my life. There is something about the work that brings out the best in one, a constant striving to develop."

The hazel eyes danced with fun. "I grant that you think you are sincere, Lon," she laughed, "but tell me, is it film magic or love magic that has made your happiness so great?"

"Both," he answered seriously. "And Robbie, if I could only win in the latter I could let the other go cheerfully and forgive Dick in the bargain." Involuntarily his eyes strayed to where Thea stood chatting with Lamb. The girl's face was not now lacking in smiles and roguishness, but Donegan knew that if he should cross to her she would withdraw within a shell of reserve that he could not penetrate, and yet he felt that she was far from indifferent to his love. It was some baffling intangible thing that lay between them.

"We'll find out some day, Alonzo," he muttered to himself, as Roberta left him at a call from Richardson. "Now, what did we say that night, Alonzo? Something about our name and being a miner."

CHAPTER V.

"A LITTLE railroading today," said the director the next morning. "The Spokane & Inland Empire are going to loan us an old car or two and a steep grade. Maxwell knows that there is a car loaded with dynamite at the foot of the grade. He believes also that Helen is tied in the dynamite car. At the top of the car he fights with Davis' men and is wounded, and then bound and thrown on a flat and the car turned loose. He unbinds himself and creeps forward, and stops the car ten feet from the dynamite car. You fellows at the top be sure the knots are loose and the brakes working."

The scene went nicely up to the time the car was started down the long grade, and Maxwell, registering pain and fear for both himself and Helen, began to twist about on the flat in a frantic effort to loosen his bonds and reach the brake. Then came a discovery that gave that particular scene a touch of realism. He could not loosen the rope binding his hands behind him and to the car floor. Some one had been careless. Had it been Harwood? He was the man who last handled the cord and pronounced the knots safe, while Lamb tested the brakes. But why?

Right then, however, Donegan was more concerned with the result than with the cause. Already the car was picking up speed and rocking down the hill toward the stationary car at the bottom.

"Some splinters, Alonzo," he said. "No use to yell, can't drown this old boat's rattle." He could hear the shouts of others, but words were indistinguishable. Richardson must think he was crazy to lie still and be carried to destruction. No, they understood something was wrong and were trying to intercept the car. They would be too late and helpless to stop the flat, even if they reached the track.

Then the little platform midway down the hill flashed into view, and on the platform was the slim little figure of the comedienne. Her body was poised for a leap, and even as he glimpsed her purpose and shouted to prevent, the girl had sprung for the speeding car, caught with one hand at an old side stake, and hung swaying over the edge. One dreadful second passed in which she seemed to fall backward, and then she was on her knees on the swaying car and crawling toward him.

"Thea!" he gasped.

"Quick! The brake!" she panted, as the stubborn knot yielded.

Donegan flung himself headlong along the car floor and put all his splendid strength upon the brake. Lamb had done his work well, and the old flat rocked to a stop not ten feet from the big box car against which it would have been battered to pieces.

The little director came dashing up. "My God! I thought the two of you were gone!" he exclaimed. "What was wrong? I'll have somebody's life for such work up top there. But McNally got it all. We'll change the story a bit. Greatest thing of the whole film. Miss Burling, your salary is doubled."

Harwood came running down the hill voluble with excuses, and after a tongue lashing from the director the excuses were accepted, especially as Donegan interceded for the other man.

Donegan had his own suspicions, but he preferred to say nothing. He wished to find a reason for the two desperate attempts that had been made to injure him. Why had Strant been so willing to hurl him from the train after so trivial a quarrel? If Harwood had really attempted to injure him, Donegan believed that some one had made a tool of the actor who would have liked to have been leading man.

"Old Cleek ought to be in on this, Alonzo," he growled. "I think we'll just hire one or two embryo Cleeks and see what we see. Don't you think the little girl is going to be nicer to us after this, Alonzo? She wouldn't take that leap if she didn't love us, would she?"

But if he expected Thea to relax her reserve Donegan was a very mistaken man. She accepted his thanks with chilling calm, and then deftly avoided something beyond thanks which was at the tip of his tongue.

The day before the filming of the final scenes of "The Blue Tropny," Director Richardson called the members of his company together, and Donegan felt that the moment he had been dreading was at hand. His work might have been good, but there was little doubt as to what action the fiery director would take when he discovered the rank deception practiced by his leading man.

"Tomorrow," began Richardson, before Donegan could speak, "we will complete the greatest picture ever given to the public by the La Paz. Tonight the wires will carry a story about our star, whom we stole away——"

"A moment, Mr. Richardson," begged Donegan, stepping forward. The little director waved him back with an imperious gesture.

"I repeat, whom we stole away from the bread line of Chicago. Alonzo Donegan, the greatest man story film star of them all."

Amid cheers and congratulations the bewildered young man pressed forward.

"How—when?" he stammered.

"Day you showed up at 611," snapped the director. "I was ready to have you kicked downstairs, even if I was to blame that evening in Chicago. Saw you fairly eating that scenario. Your personality was good. Thought I would give you a chance. If you failed the company would have a laugh. If you won, we would all laugh. You won. Shake!"

"Film magic," said Roberta, softly.

"Every cloud has a silver lining," is a very old saying. It can easily be reversed, and the La Paz people were to get the reverse with a punch to it.

Twenty minutes later the director called them together again. In his hand he held a telegram and his face was unusually sober.

"This is a formal notice of the sale of the controlling interest of the La Paz stock," he began gravely. "J. A. Strant is now president in place of that prince of old timers, Larry Rathbun. Strant evidently plans to be his own general manager, and announces that we may expect him here after he has visited the California branch. He also states that he has selected our next feature, a seven-reel story."

A chorus of groans arose as the director walked away, dejection in his movements.

Donegan had but one thought. Strant, like an animal of the jungles, was stalking Thea Burling. Control of the La Paz gave him authority and standing which other companies would not question. Thea would suffer, and very likely so would Donegan himself, from the unscrupulous use which Strant would make of his power.

If the girl would only let him thru the barrier of reserve, give him the privilege of caring for her against Strant and all else. He had seen a warm flush come into her face when the director called his name and pronounced him a success, but when she congratulated him her words had been few and cold.

"We'll stick around and take care of her, Alonzo, in spite of Strant, herself, or—that other," he told himself, as he paced the dressing-room. "There's a reason and we are going to find it."

The expected visit of the new president hung like a shadow over the company, damping their spirits and slowing up their work. At first, too, there had been anxiety as to the fate of "The Blue Trophy," but the public had settled that by setting up a joyful clamor, and the names of Donegan and Springly were becoming well known indeed.

Weeks went by, however, and Strant had not made his appearance, nor had word come from him. The new feature which he had selected had been got under way. It was estimated that "The Fighting Line" would cost two hundred thousand dollars and every member of the company felt that position and reputation hung on the success of the film.

While others wondered, Donegan studied and worked, but there were lines of anxiety on his face, and the Donegan smile was little in evidence. He was groping for a solution, and if the one he guessed was the correct one there were reasons why Strant was postponing the moment of triumph over himself and Thea. The detectives had found traces of Dick, and they led in strange directions. Photographs, too, had come, over which Donegan studied long.

Daily he saw the little comedienne growing paler and with the smiles less ready to flash forth. He went to her.

"Thea, when are you going to let me care for you? You are fearing the arrival of Strant and worrying over other things. As my wife I can protect you against every one and everything," he said.

"I cannot marry you."

"Tell me why. I'll protect you just the same, but I must know if there is some one else. You do care for me a little."

The girl was sore pressed, and had he but known it the barriers were nearly down. Could he have known of certain letters she had received Donegan would have gathered Thea in his arms and defied the world.

"I don't want to fear you, for myself, or—any one. I don't know what is right or best. Let me go! You must let me go!"

"Tell me what is troubling you besides fear of Strant," he pleaded, but she turned and ran down the path to the side door of the boarding-house.

Sorrowfully he turned to walk to his hotel. The girl watched him, a pitiful doubt in her face.

"I must save Dick, no matter what happens. I promised. If only I dare tell."

CHAPTER VI.

THEN, quite suddenly one afternoon, the new president was among them at the studio, his big body and voice dominating the place and company. For a time, however, he discarded his usual belligerent air and was cordial—too cordial. Neither recognition nor enmity showed in the pale blue eyes when he met Donegan, who, coldly polite, watched intently while Strant made his way to Thea, who had withdrawn as far as possible.

What were the secrets Strant shared with the girl, and why would she not confide in her friends? With these thoughts torturing him Donegan felt murderous.

Naturally his work was far from perfect, and Strant found occasion to comment on that fact with words suave but stinging to the younger man. Thea came in for honeyed words of praise from the big president, and Donegan's muscles swelled as he listened. He could see the plot; Strant would try praise and advancement to win what he could not accomplish by threats.

"He won't win, we know that, Alonzo; but we just cannot stand to have him talk to her, can we? If we would only hear from that Old Cleek of ours, Alonzo."

As if in answer to his wish he was called to the telephone booth and when he came out the old smile was fully in evidence.

"News, Lon?" asked Roberta.

"Great news, Robbie. If you will use those hazel eyes of yours upon Strant at closing time for ten minutes, I will repay you tomorrow with interest."

"Dick?" she questioned, but Donegan was gone in answer to the director's call.

That night Donegan waited at the studio door for Thea. Roberta had tried to keep her part of the bargain, he saw that, but Strant was not to be easily deflected and was following closely. Strant waved toward his auto, but Donegan stepped in front.

"Miss Burling is walking," he said calmly, and before either man or girl could object he had hurried her forward and joined the other strollers. Neither spoke, until halfway to her home he stopped and signaled a taxi.

"Mr. Donegan!" cried Thea. "What has come over you? You don't know what you have done already. Mr. Strant——"

"Is thru taking charge of you, thru even with talking to you. We are going to be married within thirty minutes, and after that if he looks at you I am going to eat him. See, here's the license," and he waved an official-appearing document with the joy of a small boy who has won a battle.

"I—I—will not!" she retorted indignantly. "How do you know I love you, even if there were not——"

"Love is nothing, and I know of no rivals," he said grandly. "I'm the cave man the magazine writers tell about. This is my club," and he waved the license.

A smile shown thru Thea's tears. "If McNally only had his camera trained on you, Lon!" she said.

"Only this is a r-e-a-l-l-y story, dear," he said.

The ceremony over and once more in the taxi he drew her close. "Now, Mrs. Donegan, are you sorry?"

"Oh, Lonny, take me home. I want to be home when I tell you what you have done. You will leave me then and wish you had never seen me."

"Nothing in the world could make me do or wish those things," he declared earnestly. "We are going home, but not until we have attended to a little matter of jewelry and supper."

As the car swung into Riverside avenue both glanced from the window, watching the swarms of homegoers crowding the streets. Suddenly the girl shrank back, her face blanched. Passing within a yard of their conveyance was Strant.

Donegan's anger rose fiercely, and he felt the primitive rage of a cave man as he longed to dash out and break the bones in the sleek, well-clad body. With an effort he mastered himself. After all, the other plan was best. As he soothed the agitated girl at his side another face came within their vision. An emaciated young man, so thin and white that he looked wraithlike, was passing, his head held low, like that of a hound on the scent.

"Dick!" called Donegan, struggling with the door.

At the same moment the girl flung herself on Donegan, holding him with all the strength of her young, well-trained muscles. Try as he would Donegan could not loosen her hold. Harm her he would not. He sat back.

"Thea, why are you afraid to have me speak to Dick Woods?" he demanded. "Tell me!"

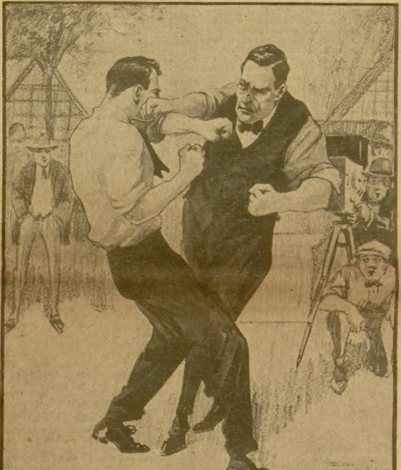
"Because he is my cousin and you will kill him. Do you think I want that and then have you h-hung?"

"But if he is planning to kill some one else and I promise merely to stop him, not harm either of them?"

"Go quick! I ought to have known you better. When you come back I will tell you all about it. You will have much to forgive."

He laughed shakily, held her close for a moment, and was gone with a brief direction to the chauffeur.

The man he sought seemed to have vanished into air. It had been growing dusk, and a fog nearly obscured the lights, making it difficult to distinguish forms or faces at any distance. After two hours of blind search Donegan called up a number. Perhaps he had been mistaken.



"Good! Try again, you blackguard!"

The voice that came over the wire was hoarse with agitation:

"He's gone, sure enough—how I don't know. Haven't been out of this room. He seemed cheerful after talking with you; then went batty and talked about avenging his own troubles. I got him quieted, and he went in to lie down. Now you say he's in the street?"

"Yes, and don't delay getting yourself and some of your men after him, quick, or there will be murder before morning."

"These Cleeks are false alarms, Alonzo," growled Donegan. "Guess we'd better send Robbie over to the little girl. We are in for an all night's hunt. Think of tomorrow, tho, Alonzo. That is, if we find that young villain in time."

It was 3 o'clock when Donegan's call over the telephone brought a welcome response.

"Got him," came a voice. "Quiet now. Says he never intended to do any murder. Claims he wanted to give some chap a chance to square himself. Says fellow turned on him and tried to finish the thing right there. Guess that is right, too, for he was being handled roughly when Burke and I ran into that Front avenue joint."

"Another item, Alonzo," he whispered. Over the telephone he spoke crisply: "Have him at the La Paz studio by 9 o'clock and bring another man with you."

"It's asking quite a lot, Lon," said the director. "This change upsets our week's work, but it goes. We'll stage that sixth-reel scene. Maybe after the thing is over you will be kind enough to give me those good reasons you tell about."

"You'll get 'em," grinned the star. "You'll get a lot of surprises today."

He had telephoned Thea that everything was all right, and promised to join her as soon as the morning's work was over. She and Roberta were excused until afternoon, he added, and the director did not wish them about at all.

President Strant was also at the studio early, and that his mood was a black one was evident.

"Changing to the sixth reel?" he roared. "What fool's idea! Change back—no, let it stand. There's some action in the reel. Let's see if this company knows what action is."

The climax of "The Fighting Line" hung on the fight scene in this reel, and the fight was to be staged between Donegan and Johnson. As the two actors faced each other the domineering, irritating voice of the president broke in again.

"I want action—get it—action, in this scrap."

"Take it easy," whispered Donegan, as the two men clinched in the beginning of the big scene. Johnson obeyed readily, and the performance as rehearsed was not one on which to hang the climax of a one-reel slapstick, to say nothing of a seven-reel feature. The president of the La Paz swore fervently.

Then it was that Donegan, brushing Johnson aside, spoke mildly. "I seem to be mostly to blame, Mr. Strant. Won't you get up here and show me? Take Johnson's place for a moment or two?"

"Why, yes," said the big man, surprised. "I keep myself in form, and I fancy I could take on the two of you if it came to a real mix."

As the speaker began to remove his coat and vest the little director walked close to Donegan, gazed solemnly into his face, and then trotted back to the camera.

"Get this, McNally," he ordered. "Get every bit of it. Don't ask why."

Then he retreated to his office for a hearty, if lonely, laugh. When he came back Strant was standing before Donegan illustrating the poses that appealed to him as representing a fighting man.

Richardson pushed his way thru the crowd which had gathered rapidly enough when the word was passed that the new boss was going to be seen in action.

None of the ladies was present, but a little group of visitors had crowded in near the door. All watched curiously, while Donegan, as mildly anxious to please as a newly graduated clergyman at his "try-out," listened carefully and followed the motions of the president.

"Now look out for yourself!" exclaimed Strant. "I am going to come in and may hurt a little. Don't cry."

The meekness fled out of Donegan's face, and before Strant's surprised, shocked eyes that face became transformed. It was the "fighting face," but Strant knew that it was in no man's power to have "registered" that face for the film. Real hate lay behind the blue eyes which had turned dead black. The whimsical lips were curled away from the teeth, and there was nothing of humor about them. The actor was rocking easily on his feet with the attitude of a trained boxer.

Perspiration leaped out on the big man's face. He dropped his hands.

"What's the matter, man? Are you crazy?"

"Yellow, are you?" The sneer was so low that the onlookers did not hear it, but at the words and tone Strant's face became blood red.

"Want to let Johnson step in?" questioned the taunting voice.

Whatever else he might be, Strant was no coward, and now he threw up his clinched fists to guard, and like lightning shot a straight left for Donegan's jaw.

"Good! Try again, you blackguard!" and a swift, stinging blow on the big man's cheek accented the insult.

"This is for the insults you have heaped on a lady and this for the sneers at our work." A right and left stung the president's ribs.

"I am going to kill you," choked Strant. "Try this!" Donegan's daring had carried him a trifle too far, and the other's fist caught his exposed jaw with crushing force. Donegan spun half around and dropped to the floor, everything whirling in dizzying circles.

"Now," roared Strant, and he kicked the prostrate man. Screams of rage and imprecations halted his second cowardly blow, and as he hesitated Donegan rolled from his reach and came slowly to his feet.

Regardless of the hisses and groans of the crowd, Strant rushed fiercely, but Donegan, covering, ducked and retreated. He wanted to get back his strength and felt that he was succeeding, altho the pain in his ribs where the heel of the other had landed was almost unendurable.

"What I would expect of a man who would make a drug fiend of a man so that he could rob his friend," he muttered, as he blocked another vicious swing. His words seemed to drive Strant quite mad.

"I'll get you, get you, get you!" he chanted, rushing in wild with the fury that filled him, and as he rushed flailing the air with blows that had they landed would have felled a horse.

Donegan, once more breathing easily, evaded his rushes, now and then landing, every blow one that would mark the face or body for many days. Then, with surprising quickness, Strant dropped his guard, ran in and seized Donegan with the bear grip that had been the latter's undoing that night on the Saida.

He was not, however, reckoning on the difference between the weakened man and the physically perfect one that now faced him. The strenuous life with the La Paz had recuperated the former miner until he was once more "Bearcat Lon" of Bluefield.

Swiftly Donegan measured his strength and knew that he could break the hold.

"What I am giving you now is for the life of the boy you ruined!" he said.

He jerked back, half clearing his right from that paralyzing grip, and the half-arm jolt went full against the straining Adam's apple of the other's neck. Then, as Strant's arms relaxed, the actor's left fell flush on the jaw, and the president of the La Paz dropped and lay still.

"Now, Lon, I am ready for mine," said a low voice, and Donegan whirled to confront a white-faced young man who had forced his way thru the crowd.

"Dick!" he shouted.

"I was going to kill that beast," said the white-faced chap, levelly, "but your way was better. I deserve a beating or death as well as he. Go ahead."

"Dick, Dick!" Thea was sobbing at the man's side, while she stretched her hands to her husband. "This is what I wanted to tell you, Lon. I hid him and protected him after he had robbed you. He is my cousin, and that man," she pointed to Strant with loathing, "that man tried to give Dick to the law, and then tried to have him killed. He was afraid for himself, too, and that is why he kept away. He threatened me in letters, and said you would kill Dick anyway, even if I married you. I didn't want Dick killed and you a murderer, and I was afraid of that man. Then you just married me, and now everything is all right." Smiles gleamed where tears had been.

Donegan's swollen features twisted with his old smile as he reached one hand to Dick and clasped his wife with the other.

"Robbie is peevish because we are holding Dick here, Thea. Outside of that, everything is all right."

The End.

* * *

Rank Injustice.

"Pa," inquired a 7-year-old seeker after the truth, "is it true that schoolteachers get paid?"

"Certainly it is," said the father.

"Well, then," said the youth indignantly, "that ain't right. Why should the teachers get paid when us kids do all the work?"

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Beatrice Farnham's Rescue

Or, Beyond the Mexican Border

By Charles Haven Liebe

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CHAPTER VIII.

BEATRICE chose a room on the second floor, facing the east, for her own apartment. It was not suited for a boudoir, by any means; but no room there was suited for a boudoir. The furniture, like all the other furniture in the great stone house, was very heavy and very plain. Beatrice made her toilet as well as she could, and Alejandra brought her something to eat.

The sun had set when she finished her meal. Alejandra brought an oil lamp of chased silver.

"You needn't light it," murmured Beatrice. "I am very tired, and I shall go directly to bed. You may go, Alejandra."

"Bien, senorita," and Alejandra disappeared.

Beatrice bolted the two doors of her room, and went to bed feeling quite secure.

To make the best of difficulties was one of the girl's strongest characteristics, and she resolved to remove all worriment from her mind. She went to sleep readily, and she slept until long after daybreak. That day and another night passed uneventfully, with only occasional glimpses of the bandit chief. Altho Beatrice did not know it, Lorenzo Benevidas was spending most of his time at the pass, getting ready for an attacking force that he knew in his heart would soon come.

Still another morning passed uneventfully, and another afternoon came. Wearying of her imprisonment—for it amounted to just that, after all—Beatrice called her duenna to her and announced her intention of exploring the old house from garret to cellar. Alejandra threw up her hands in protest.

"But—Senorita Farnham!" she exclaimed. "The Senor General would not like it at all!"

"You had orders, didn't you," quickly said Beatrice, "to do anything I wished done? I wish that you show me over this house from garret to cellar, Alejandra!"

The buxom Mexican woman shrugged her shoulders in the true Latin fashion.

"But," she replied, "the Senor General forgot something."

"Forgot something!" repeated Jackson Farnham's daughter, with a widening of her topaz eyes. Few are the women who can altogether resist curiosity. "What did he forget, Alejandra?"

Again the Mexican woman shrugged her shoulders. She did not answer. It made Beatrice all the more determined to explore.

"Light a lamp, Alejandra," she ordered crisply. "We will begin with the cellar."

"Santissima!" exclaimed the wife of Miguel, the caretaker. "There is no cellar, senorita!"

In her averted eyes there was falsehood, and Beatrice knew it. Beatrice began to look for an entrance to the cellar. For a quarter of an hour she searched, in the house and out, and did not find it. Then she opened the door of a deep closet in the rear of the house, and examined the floor. She saw an iron ring that lay half concealed in the wood. After a sternly reproachful glance at her duenna, she stooped, caught the ring in her hand, and lifted open a door that revealed a flight of stone steps leading downward and into darkness.

"Bring a lighted lamp, Alejandra!" she cried imperatively.

Miguel's wife protested vigorously, but the girl would not listen. Alejandra brought the light.

"Lead the way," said Beatrice.

She followed the Mexican woman down the flight of stone steps. The walls of the cellar were wet, and they glistened in the yellow rays of the oil lamp. Then Beatrice saw, sitting on a wooden box, an old man clad in the remains of what had at one time been the velvet and lace attire of a Spanish gentleman. His hair was very gray, and so was his rather heavy beard; his cheeks were white and hollow, and his eyes were far too bright.

"So this," said Beatrice, in a cold voice, "is what the 'Senor General' forgot! I cannot see, Alejandra, how he could ever forget this! What a brute Lorenzo Benevidas must be!"

At the words the old prisoner arose weakly to his feet, and Beatrice heard the rattle of a chain.

"Delicia!" he cried, holding out his pitifully thin arms to Jackson Farnham's daughter—and there was all the joy, as well as all the sorrow, of a whole lifetime in his voice. "It is you, my Delicia—gracias a Dios—it is you, my Delicia!"

"I am not Delicia," said Beatrice, very gently. At first she had thought him insane; but now she saw that the light that was in his old eyes was not the light of insanity. "Perhaps," she continued, "I resemble some one whom you know, senor."

The old man let his arms fall to his sides and shook his head in a manner that indicated both great disappointment and utter hopelessness.

"The likeness is very great," he muttered. "Why are you here?"

"I am a prisoner," answered the girl.

"Aha, a prisoner," and again the old Spaniard shook his head. "I, too, am a prisoner, senorita. And we will never escape. Here we will die. Some one, some day, will find my poor skeleton here in its chains."

"I am not so sure of that," Beatrice said quickly. "A band of Americans are already on their way here to liberate me, I feel sure, and they will set you free, too. But—who is Delicia?"

"My daughter," he answered readily. "My one daughter. Americans, did you say? Ah, they are fighters, all of them!"

"Why are you being kept here?" asked Beatrice.

"Why!" exclaimed the old Spaniard. "This is my house. With my own hands I helped to build it. The Valley of Palms—it is mine, my own. Benevidas—senorita, there is a demon! He took it all from me, all, all! He thinks I have money hidden here somewhere. So he said to me this:

" 'I will chain you in the cellar, and feed you nothing but bread and water, until you tell me where your money is buried!'

"That is what he said to me, senorita. El demonio! And here I am chained, and I eat bread and water. Senorita, I have no money hidden."

At that instant Alejandra touched Beatrice on the arm. "We must be going," said Miguel's wife. "The General may return at any moment. If he finds us here——"

And once more she gave that Latin shrug that expresses so much in such a simple way.

Beatrice leaned forward and whispered, "Keep heart in you, senor. You will be freed very soon."

The two women turned and hastened up the stone steps. Once on the floor of the room over the cellar, Alejandra closed the cellar door and the closet door, and put the lamp where it belonged.

Beatrice took a Spanish novel from a rack, and went to the vine-covered front veranda. Benevidas sat on the steps; he was smoking a cigarette and cleaning a magazine pistol.

"Buenas, Senorita Farnham!" he greeted her, very courteously. "Can you think of anything else that may be done for your pleasure?"

"Yes," said Beatrice. She had a plan by which she hoped to relieve the suffering of the old Spaniard. "I would like to have some educated person to read to me. I fear I am growing lazy, General Benevidas!"

The bandit was highly pleased at the new tone in her voice. "Would Miguel do—or Alejandra?"

Beatrice forced a laugh. "They are not educated persons!"

"True," agreed Benevidas. For a moment he twisted his black mustache and considered. Then: "I have it, senorita! There is a well-educated old man here; tomorrow he shall read for you. It is growing late now, and you have a fashion of retiring early, you know."

"Thank you!" smiled Beatrice. Her plan had succeeded.

"It was a pleasure to grant you that," said the bandit; and he holstered his pistol and went away.

As soon as the dusk began to settle in the Valley of Palms, Beatrice went upstairs to the room she claimed as her own. Only in that room, with both doors bolted, did she feel safe after nightfall; somehow the night whispered of strange and terrible things there in that old house, unless she was behind bolted doors and barred windows.

For two hours Beatrice sat at an open window and tried to solve the riddle that had perplexed her so often during the days she had spent as a prisoner of the bandit Benevidas—where had she heard, and when had she heard, of the Valley of Palms and of its great old stone house? The answer, she felt, lay just beyond the grasp of her memory. And there was another queer thing that both worried and puzzled her:

The old Spaniard had called her Delicia. Delicia was Beatrice's dead mother's name. And Beatrice knew that she resembled her mother, her Spanish mother. The answer to this, too, was elusive.

Suddenly the girl became conscious of the fact that a young palm tree that grew not far from her window was bending slowly toward her! She sat up straight, alarmed. But her window was barred, and she had nothing to fear, she reasoned; so she sat very still and waited. Nearer and nearer came the tree, and then Beatrice made out dimly the figure of a man who was climbing slowly and soundlessly toward the umbrella-shaped top! Two minutes more, and the figure stepped safely to the roof of the veranda at a point directly opposite Beatrice's window. It must be a friend!

The girl called in a low voice, "Mr. Ford?"

The figure wheeled quickly and faced the barred window; then a rich young American voice replied softly, gladly:

"Dear lady!"

"Thank Heaven!" Beatrice Farnham breathed to herself—and Laramie Ford heard her plainly.

Ford stole across the red-tiled roof and knelt at the window. "Are you safe?" he wanted to know, his voice eager.

"So far," whispered Beatrice. "How did you ever manage to get thru that pass?"

"Long Tom and I ran the guard line—we crawled like snakes over the bottom of the pass. It wasn't half so hard to do as we thought it would be, and yet it was hard enough to do. Tom is waiting at the wall; he'll help you over. But—how are you going to get out?"

He shook the bars. They were firmly embedded in the masonry.

"And how would I get down from the veranda roof?" smiled Beatrice. "I couldn't climb down a palm tree—I'd fall. I guess I'd better go downstairs and make my escape properly, by one of the front doors, Mr. Ford!"

"I'll meet you there," said the young American. "Take this revolver with you—and don't be afraid to shoot, if it's necessary."

He passed the revolver to her, and she went toward the hallway.

Laramie Ford hastened to the young palm, locked his arms and legs around its smooth body, and let himself slide slowly to the ground. Then he went quietly around to the steps at the front of the house and waited.

A moment, and a light flashed somewhere in the house. Following this there came the vitriolic voice of Benevidas raised in a Spanish oath. A revolver roared. Ford dashed across the veranda and to a door; it was fastened on the inside. He sprang to a window and peered in. To his right stood Miguel, the caretaker, with a lamp in his hand. To his left stood Beatrice Farnham, with her thick brown hair uncoiled. Straight in front of him was Benevidas. In one hand the bandit held the revolver he had just taken from the girl; in the other he held the little package that contained the Blue Star!

CHAPTER IX.

NONE of those in the house saw the white face of Laramie Ford, who stood on the dark veranda, wholly weaponless, and watched thru a window. For an instant Beatrice Farnham and Benevidas, the bandit, and Miguel, the caretaker, were as motionless and as silent as stone figures. Then Benevidas pocketed the package that contained the great diamond, and spoke:

"Where did you get this revolver, Senorita Farnham?"

Beatrice winced at the sound of his voice. She took a step backward and said nothing. She was more or less dazed with disappointment; her escape had seemed so certain. Lorenzo Benevidas repeated his question sharply, and again it was followed by a heavy silence. The bandit's countenance grew darker and more malignant; his inborn egotism had persuaded him to believe, only the evening before, that nine-tenths of Beatrice Farnham's objections to him had been overcome.

"So you refuse to answer me, do you, my dear senorita?" He was smiling, but his eyes shown like the eyes of a demon in the yellow light of the oil lamp. "Very well," he continued. "I shall have to force you to tell me how you came by this perfectly reliable American-made revolver."

Meanwhile Laramie Ford's resourceful brain was working fast. He wondered if Long Tom, who was hidden behind the spiked stone wall, waiting to help the girl over, had heard the sound of the shot the girl had fired in defense of herself. The thick walls of the house had muffled it, he knew, and Long Tom was some little distance away. Suddenly he saw Benevidas spring forward and seize one of Beatrice's wrists brutally in a big, brown hand, the hand of a strangler. Beatrice cried out in pain.

"Where did you get it?" gritted Benevidas.

"Stop!" ordered Ford, acting upon an idea that had just entered his mind. He had the advantage of the darkness; the bandit did not know, of course, that he was unarmed. "Stop! Move, and I'll kill you—as sure as powder burns I'll kill you if you move! You will please give the revolver back to Miss Farnham, Benevidas, and give it to her handle first—handle first, mind you! Be quick!"

The bandit straightened with a jerk. The threatening voice of Ford had come to him like a bolt from the blue. He slowly and nervously held out the revolver, handle first, to Miss Farnham.

"Now, dear lady," Ford went on, "please go to the door and unfasten it, and come out here."

Beatrice flushed with pleasure at his words. She held the big .45 in readiness, and started for the door. Benevidas made a move as tho to put out his hand and stop her. She raised the revolver.

"I won't miss this time!" she warned.

The bandit swore roundly under his breath.

Beatrice unfastened the great iron-strapped door and swung it open, and

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soon she was standing beside Laramie Ford.

"Now what shall we do?" she whispered.

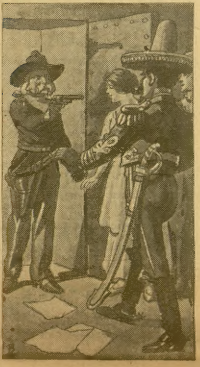
"Do this," came the carefully whispered answer. "Run across the grounds to the eastward, and find three palms that stand so close together, only a few feet from the spiked wall, that their three tops look like one. Call Tom. He'll hear you, and he'll help you over the spikes. From then on you'll have to trust to Tom. He has both our rifles and he has his revolver. I'll keep Benevidas where he is until you can get into the clear, anyway—good-by, and good luck!"

She did not leave him, as he had expected. One of her hands found its way to one of his hands.

"But what is to become of you?" she asked.

"Never mind me," he said bravely—"I've been in tighter places, I think. Now run for it!"

There was a wicked laugh, and the sound of heavy feet on the veranda floor near the steps, and a half dozen Mexicans in the tattered uniforms of revolutionists leaped upon them. Ford strove to take the revolver from the girl's hand, and failed; the two had been separated by the onslaught of the bandit's henchmen. Before Beatrice could level the revolver, it was wrenched from her grasp. A minute more, and the two were taken roughly into the great room that Beatrice had just left. Benevidas folded his arms and stood there smiling at them in his evil way. Young Ford's splendid bluff had been all for less than nothing—he himself was a prisoner now!



"Stand still!"

Then Benevidas strode over to Ford and deliberately tweaked his nose. Ford struggled, but it was useless; the hands that held him were many and strong.

"Still meddling, are you?" sneered the bandit. "Before long, my Gringo, you shall see what becomes of those who are so unwise as to meddle with my affairs."

The young Texan was beside himself with anger. No man had ever dared to tweak his nose before. He forgot that discretion is valor itself, and blazed out furiously:

"It will be a slit throat, perhaps, or a knife in the back—you could, of course, knife me in front just as easy; but you're not apt to do that; you'd knife me in the back to satisfy your nature! The greatest regret I shall have, barring one, is that I shall not be permitted to be present when your day of reckoning comes. Oh, it will come, all right! And it will sure be some day of reckoning, believe me, Mr. Benevidas! Do you think you can hold that pass forever? How did I get in?"

He had spoken in English, and only Beatrice, Benevidas and the caretaker understood him. Beatrice caught his eye, gave him a warning look, and shook her head. He knew, then, that his outburst had been much more foolish than brave, and that there was nothing whatever to be gained by defying the unscrupulous Benevidas.

At some other moment, it might have suited the whim of the bandit to kill Laramie Ford. Now, however, he smiled rather complacently and asked:

"Are you counting on help from Colonel Espionzo? Bah, you Gringo. Don't think the Carranzistas are going to help you. Do you recall that old story you Americans used to tell and laugh over—the story of the policeman who separated a married couple that had gone to fighting? Both man and wife turned upon the policeman! So both the Villistas and the Carranzistas will turn upon the Americans. Yes, I am aware that Gen. Francisco Villa is to be hunted by American troops—perhaps he is already being hunted by them."

Then Lorenzo Benevidas faced one of the men who had arrived at the house just in time to prevent the escape of Beatrice Farnham.

"Why did you come in from the pass, Gregorio?" he wanted to know. "Have you news?"

"Yes, Senor General," answered the man called Gregorio. "The Americano who rode to Santa Catalina for Colonel Espionzo has returned—and alone, save for the old Senor Farnham. That big ranchero, the father of this young man here, he swears that he will go thru the pass before the setting of another sun—Julano, who understands the language of the Gringo, has been spying and listening, Senor General. We have made a fire in the pass, and we have mounted the machine gun on a ledge thirty feet above it and a little way behind it; by the light of the fire we will shoot the Americans down, if they come."

"You are a jewel, Gregorio!" said Benevidas. "Remember, you are to take no prisoners——"

He broke off abruptly and stared toward the doorway, which had been left open. He was not prepared for that which he saw, and, being at heart a coward, he was unnerved. Standing there in the doorway was the tall, lean figure of a man in the attire of a plainsman, who held a cocked revolver in his hand—and he called out in Spanish in a voice that defied all disobedience:

"Stand still!" And they stood still. They stood as motionless as tho they were frozen. Long Tom went on rapidly, his usual drawl now nowhere in evidence:

"Duck, lady, and get out o' the way. Disarm them, Kid, and watch your business close. Shoot at the turnin' of an eyelash."

One of Benevidas' henchmen dived under and tried to seize the old Westerner about the legs, to trip him; Long Tom fired quickly, and the Mexican shrank away with a bullet in his shoulder.

"Next—as the barber says," cried Tom. "Who's next?"

His voice struck fear into the hearts of the Mexicans. Benevidas realized that he was very near to a violent death, and it made him desperate. He moved slowly a foot to his left without attracting Angel's notice; then he suddenly struck the oil lamp from Miguel's hand, and went to his knees on the floor as a bullet sped only a few inches above him. Angel feared to shoot again; Ford was somewhere among the Mexicans, and Angel had not seen the girl leave the room. With the coming of darkness there was a wild scramble and muttered curses, and Long Tom was swept off his feet; he knelt beside the doorway, with his revolver ready, and tried vainly to pierce the thick blackness with his eyes. The shuffling of feet died away, and an almost sepulchral silence came.

Neither Ford nor Angel dared to speak, for fear of bringing a bullet; they were not sure that all the Mexicans were gone. The silent minutes were as ages to the two men, who knelt there on the floor and waited for day to break. And when dawn came, they saw that they were alone in the room. They rose, stretched their cramped limbs, and closed and barred the heavy front door. Then each went to a window and looked out.

"Nobody in sight here," said Angel, slowly twisting at one side of his ridiculously long mustaches.

"The same here," said Ford. He raised his voice and called, "Where are you, Miss Farnham?"

Miss Farnham appeared in an inner doorway. She was smiling cheerfully.

"Here I am, Mr. Ford," she answered. "I've been looking thru the house and making sure that the rear doors were fastened. So Benevidas and his men are gone! Even Alejandra, the caretaker's wife, is gone. Have you laid out a plan of action, Mr. Ford?"

"Not yet." He turned to Long Tom Angel. "Benevidas has the Blue Star again. I wish you had made him give it up, while you had the drop on him—but you didn't know he had it, of course. I'm sorry I didn't think of it."

"Never mind the Blue Star," said Beatrice. "If we get out of this with our lives, we'll be lucky enough."

"But the diamond represents your entire fortune, Miss Farnham," replied Ford, "and we shall certainly try to recover it for you."

Then Beatrice told the two Texans of the little chest of gem-set jewelry that

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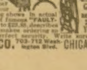

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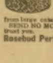

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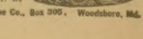

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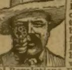

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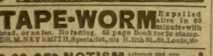

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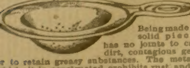

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Benevidas kept hidden in the house, and the three of them went to see whether it was still where it had been a day or so before. Beatrice showed Ford the exact spot, and he knelt and lifted out the stone. The chest was there; he threw open the lid, and the sight that greeted his eyes brought a gasp of surprise from his lips.

"It's a regular Captain Kidd treasure!" he exclaimed. "It was all stolen, of course."

"Yes," Beatrice agreed, "it's loot. If it wasn't, I'd feel like taking it along, if ever we escape from the Valley of Palms, in lieu of the Blue Star."

Ford went to his feet. "You're going to do that, Miss Farnham. It's loot, but you could never find the real owners; if you tried, you'd give it to the wrong parties. Remember what you've lost in the Blue Star! We'll just proceed to find a new hiding-place for this, Miss Farnham."

He looked toward Long Tom Angel, who stood with his mouth agape. "You act as sentry for a while, will you? Watch from the downstairs windows, to see that we're not watched, and not shot in the back."

"Sure," nodded Angel.

Beatrice and Ford took the jewels from the mahogany chest, carried them to the garret, and hid them in the top of a stone wall. They had barely finished the work, when they heard the voice of Long Tom:

"Come down here, Kid!"

Ford hastened down to the first floor, with Beatrice following close upon his heels. Long Tom stood at one of the front windows.

"What is it?" asked Ford, breathlessly.

For answer, Long Tom pointed toward the front veranda steps and said:

"That woman there."

Ford looked and saw a buxom middle-aged Mexican woman, with a gaudy mantilla about her shoulders, sitting on the steps. Her head was bowed, and her hands were held over her face; her shoulders shook, as tho with violent grief.

"It's Alejandra!" cried Beatrice. She addressed the wife of Miguel: "What is the matter, Alejandra?" in Spanish.

The woman wiped her eyes and turned her face toward the three at the window.

"That dog Benevidas — he stabbed Miguel last night! And it is all my fault, senorita—all my fault! I was the housekeeper for the good old Don Jaime; I betrayed him into the hands of the dog Benevidas; and now I am paying for my sins! Senorita, Miguel was not as good as he might have been, but he was my husband, and I loved him. Will you not liberate the don for me?"

"Who is Don Jaime?" asked Beatrice.

"Oh, the old man in the cellar," quickly explained Miguel's wife.

"Why, yes!" said Jackson Farnham's daughter. She inwardly reproached herself for having forgotten the plight of the old Spaniard, even during those trying hours that were just over. "Why, of course we will liberate the don. It shall be done immediately. Where is Benevidas now, Alejandra?"

"He is with his men at the pass, senorita," was the ready answer.

Beatrice opened the door. "You may come in, Alejandra, if you like."

"Thanks, Senorita Farnham!" The woman appeared to be almost overcome with gratitude. Another moment, and she was in the house. She seized Beatrice's hand, and covered it with kisses.

"Let us hasten to the good old Don Jaime!" Alejandra urged. "Have you a match?" to Ford. "We will have need of a light."

She led the three Americans to the cellar. Ford and Angel had brought such tools as they could find, which consisted of a hammer and a short-handled ax, and they at once set to work to sever the chain that held the old man to a stone pillar. Don Jaime thanked them over and over, as they worked.

Alejandra put the lighted lamp down on a box and helped them. Beatrice, too, lent a hand when she could. It was very tedious. The chain was of the toughest iron, and the ax was without temper. They were the greater part of an hour in releasing the old don.

When the Spaniard finally staggered free of the galling fetters that he had endured so long, Beatrice took the lamp from the box and started for the stairway. But suddenly she turned backward, and her face was white.

"Where is Alejandra?" she cried.

Alejandra was nowhere to be seen. Ford rushed to the foot of the stone stairway and looked upward; he saw no light where there should have been light!

"We are trapped, Miss Farnham," he said, forcing a smile. "Alejandra has stolen out and fastened the door up there."

Long Tom ran up the steps, put his shoulder to the door, and strained every muscle in his sinewy body. The door gave not the fraction of an inch.

"Trapped is the right word," he said, returning to the others. "If I'd had the sense of a horned toad I'd have stayed up there and watched. But I never was much of a hand at regrettin'. Wait! If ever I have another chance at Benevidas, I'll get him!"

From the room directly above them came the laugh of Lorenzo Benevidas; and following it came this, in the voice of the bandit chief:

"My poor dead Miguel, we will drink a whole bottle of cognac to the long life of Senora Alejandra, the shrewdest woman in Mexico! Poor dead Miguel—ha! ha! ha!"

The conclusion of this highly interesting story will be found in the Ledger issue of next week. Read it. If you are not a regular subscriber to the Ledger we would like to have your name on our list. The Ledger is only $1.00 per year.

* * *

NOT A MOLLYCODDLE.

Ferris entered the house with a look of disgust on his face. "Will you kindly tell me," he demanded of his wife, "what kind of a mollycoddle we're bringing up?"

"I will if I can," responded Mrs. Ferris, amiably.

"If you can?" exploded Ferris. "Can? Well, when a boy gets to be 10 years old and still plays with dolls and his mother doesn't know that he's a mollycoddle!" Ferris paused dramatically. "I suppose you didn't know, and won't care when you do know, that your son, Chester, is out in the back yard wheeling Catherine's doll up and down in the doll carriage."

Mrs. Ferris laughed. "I rather like to have him play with Catherine and her dolls," she replied. "It keeps him out of mischief."

"Mischief!" snorted Ferris. "I don't think you need to worry about his getting into mischief. A fellow that plays with dolls at his age!" From his tone one would have inferred that getting into mischief was the thing of all others that Ferris desired his small son to do.

Mrs. Ferris laughed again when her husband, coming home rather early the next afternoon, found Chester in the kitchen busily ironing the doll's clothes. He looked up with a smile at his indignant parent.

"Come here and look at Miss Polly's dress, dad," he urged. "It's all hand made, I made it myself. And it's all hand ironed," he added, with a mischievous chuckle.

Thereupon Ferris once more sought out his wife and declared emphatically that the boy must not be allowed to do such things.

"Really, dear," said Mrs. Ferris, dropping a smile into the darning she was doing, "I know Chester is different from other boys, but he isn't in the least effeminate. He does odd things because he wants to do them. Wait."

Even Mrs. Ferris was willing to admit that Chester's independence had taken a strange turn when, shortly afterward, Ferris found his son sitting on the front porch trimming an old hat of his mother's.

"By George!" Ferris bellowed. "I'll send him to a military school or out West to learn to be a cowboy, or—or—to jail. Anywhere to teach him to quit such baby nonsense."

It was at this moment that Chester's parents, watching from the window, saw the leader and a member of the "gang" appear at the corner. When the nature of Chester's occupation was revealed to them they made a bee line for the Ferris residence.

"Lookit, lookit!" they shouted. "Come on over, fellows, and watch the sissy boy. He's trimming a hat!"

From all points of the compass the "gang" came at the call. They stood on the sidewalk and jeered the milliner.

"Sissy boy, sissy boy!" they cried, insultingly. "Mamma's baby boy makes hats and doll dresses. Give him a bottle of milk. Get him an animal cracker. Sissy boy, sissy boy!"

Chester calmly put the finishing touch on a bow that he was working upon. "Some bow, fellers, huh?" he inquired, pleasantly. "I'm going to put it on the crown." Which he did. Then he placed the hat gently upon his head.

"Some hat, fellows, huh?" he asked, sweetly.

Chester's calm tones seemed to act as a damper upon the "gang." They watched him in silence while he tied the ribbon strings underneath his chin.

"Now," he said, when this was done, and for the first time there was a hint of belligerency in his voice, "does anybody want to call me a sissy boy?"

There was a pause. Then, "Sissy boy, sissy boy!" came rather faintly from the center of the crowd.

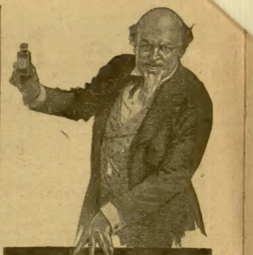
Chester descended the steps in a dignified way until he reached the bottom. Then he made a sudden and skillful dive that landed him in the center of the group. There was a startled yelp, much like that given by a puppy when suddenly attacked.

Chester emerged from the encounter with the hat still on his head. His triumphant carriage was in sharp contrast to that of his foe, who was now traveling rapidly in the direction of his own home. "Anybody else want some?" the conqueror inquired genially.

There was an awkward pause. Then the erstwhile leader of the "gang" spoke. "Aw, what's the use of scrappin'?" he asked. "Come on, Ches, les' us go and play football in the lot."

Still decorated with his millinery creation, Chester led the procession.

Ferris gave a low whistle. "Well," he said, "I believe after all we don't need to be in such a rush to send that kid to a military school."



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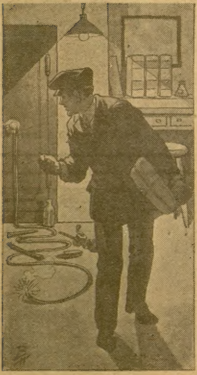

"I make my little exit."

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Begun in No. 15, April 8. Subscriptions can begin with that issue or back copies can be obtained from news stands, our agents or by mail from office of publication.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"YES," continued McCracken, tossing one leg over the other and thrusting his thumbs jauntily in the armholes of his vest, "it's little Luke f'r th' talkfest—an' I'll hand it to you gents straight from the shoulder. But as to metin' out so much punishment when I get done, well—we'll see. P'raps little Luke McCracken may indulge in some dictatin' when our Haygoo Peace Conference comes off. So as I says before, gents, I'm Dummy Peters. Is that slippin' it over on th' rubes, chief, or ain't it?

"But as to Vandersloan. Don't 'spose it makes much diff as to where and how I first bumped into Charlie Vandersloan. Enough f'r me to say that him an' me got acquainted out in Omaha, Nebraska. An' we struck up a pretty warm friendship, considerin' as I was what some folks might call a yegg, an' him a nice, respectable cashier in the Commercial Savings Bank of Omaha.

"At any rate, him and me went along thicker 'an thieves on the side, until I gets a little stretch of five years behind the stone walls of the Nebraska Big House f'r makin' a play at doin' a peetman job on a little country bank in that State.

"Natchelly, chief, we loses track o' each other in that long interim. But five years—'r three year nine for good behavior—always runs out, an' so, too, does mine finally. So one sunny day I walks out of the Nebraska State Hotel, wonderin' whether to make a play at bein' an honest man f'r a few years, or to try an' crack another joint an' get a stake. F'r it's plain that my new kicks, sky piece an' general front ain't goin' to last forever. An' winter's comin' on—an' me without no benny.

"So I rustles around thru the Southwest and works in the harvests. But that kind of long, hard work, chief, is enough to turn a honest man into a crook from his ear lobes to his toe-nails. I tell you I gets tired of workin' in the hot sun from near three in the mornin' till seven at night. But when a guy's got the lockstep swing in his gait, a buried past, an' a dome clipped like a bullet, there ain't no other kinds of work to get. So I just natchelly decides to take one last chance on one o' these here small change jobs—a rube town bank.

"But I ain't got my job sized up just yet. With a century in my jeans I blows into St. Looey on a rattler and rounds up an old pal in a joint on Market street near the Eads Bridge. An' I says to—but never mind, chief. I ain't the guy to hand out any gratooytus information about any pals. This story concerns just little Luke McCracken an' a dead gink that was a bigger crook than Scar-chin Luke ever thought o' bein'.

"As I says, I rounds up this old pal o' mine an' negotiates f'r the use of a little kit. You know the layout, chief. A bunch of hacksaws, chisels, drills, some soap, a bull's-eye lantern, a coil of slow an' a coil of fast burnin' fuse, an' a vial of soup. Along with the kit, my pal gives me a hot tip to size up some of them there Missouri sleepy-town banks, it bein' right after harvest. An' along with the tip he hands out some advice. Says he: 'Watch out most of all f'r your getaway, Luke. In them Ozark towns, where only a few roads leads in over the hills, they can nab you within a half-hour after th' blast.'

"But I tell you, chief, there wasn't much need of him tellin' me the tricks an' slips of a game that I'd been dabblin' in f'r—well, a long time; enough time to give me a total of fourteen year in stir. But bein' as he was a good sort of a fellow, I decides to pay attention to the tip he hands me out—free gravis.

"So on September 10th—over a year ago, of course—I drops off a train on the St. Looey an' Southwestern Texas at a little burg called Maryland, Missouri. An' I walks three miles back along the tracks to Brownsville, Missouri, stashin' my kit in a little natural dugout on the way. And then I marches into Brownsville as fine as you like, keepin' my peepers open f'r what I could see.

"A number of guys takes a pike at me on the way, but I remember in particular this here guy that's just been draggin' my facial disfiggerments over the coals." He waved his hand in the direction of President Allen Stillwell. "'Holy Gee!' I says, the minute I lamps him. 'This town is some real up-to-date burg all right, all right, f'r there's a reg'lar Fift' avenoo dude in the wilds o' Missouri!'"

Billy McClintock cast a hurried glance toward Stillwell, and saw that the latter was obviously ill at ease under McCracken's somewhat apt description of his general appearance.

"An' I guess," continued McCracken, "that the gentleman over yonder piked me off pretty close, too, considerin' that hell-fer-sartin identification he just handed out."

"Never mind the side remarks, McCracken," interpolated Chief Callahan, irritably. "Stick to the main story."

The little man looked coolly toward the police official.

"I think I got th' floor," he snarled. "Them as don't want to stick around till I get on the stretch can——" He waved his hand majestically toward the door and gave a slight mock bow. "Gents—the door stands open f'r you all."

"That's all right, Mr. McCracken," commented Jarrick, soothingly, with a slight warning glance toward Callahan. "Just give us the story in your own way."

"An' that's the way you're goin' to get it," returned McCracken emphatically. "From soup to nuts—an' no other way. Well, gents, I was blowin' along th' main stem, keepin' my eye peeled f'r the town's toy bank, an' wonderin' how many sheriffs or marshals Brownsville sported, when who does I spot trottin' down the street but my old soulmate—Charlie Vandersloan, who used to cop out my hard-earned coin in the poker games in Omaha.

"Now, if I was a plain, dyed-in-the-wool fool, I'd 'a' bust out surprised an' said: ''Lo, Charlie.' But I'm a little too wise f'r a stunt like that. Instead, I gives a little raise of my eyebrows an' starts off down the stem in the direction of the country. I beats it out about a half-mile an' sits down behind a currant bush, waitin' f'r him to catch up with me. And sure enough, pretty soon he comes lopin' along like a Ford car.

"'Holy Cow, Luke!' he pipes up. 'What in blazes brings you to Brownsville? Last I knew of you, you was up the river.'

"'Yes,' I grunts, 'but you didn't think I was servin' life, did you? I'm in Brownsville lookin' f'r a factory site to build twin baby carriages. But what are you doin' in these would-be mountains, with a forty-dollar front on you and a pair of clean white cuffs?'

"'Same old thing,' he says, weary-like. 'Cashierin' f'r a bank. Lucky f'r that restless, rovin' disposition of mine that I stands high with the Bankers' Protective Association. It gives me a chance to mosey along every two or three years.' He looks me over and starts to laugh. 'Luke, you sly old devil. You don't know the difference between a twin baby carriage an' a washin' machine. What are you really doin' in Brownsville? I call you. Lay down.'

"Now, Charlie and me had been pretty close confidanties in them bygone years, an' I had a sudden impulse to out an' tell him th' truth, f'r I knew that he was as crooked as a corkscrew and that he only stuck to the respecterble walks in life because he was a white-liver and afraid to take a chance on breakin' big ones into little ones with a sledge-hammer.

"But I plays cautious-like, with the result that we seesaws back an' forth for about an hour, lyin' an' beatin' about the bush till pretty soon we gets two pretty def'nite ideas in our minds. My idea is this: That he's got somethin' on his chest, and that I'm ripe f'r a little deal that's botherin' him. And he, of course, gets next to the fact that I'm not in Brownsville f'r no good purpose, by no means.

"But after we unburdens ourselves an' gets onto a common footin', so to speak, he claps me on the back.

"'Luke,' he says, 'you lucky dog. You've arrove at Brownsville at the physiological moment. It's the hand o' fate.'

"But as I'm puzzlin' at that, he begins to get scary. So he grabs me by the arm an' leads me over to a stretch o' woods where we can talk without bein' seen by any passin' buggies. An' there he ups and tells me about somethin' that certainly int'rests me, bein' as it's right in my own line of work.

"'There's a gold brick worth $10,000 in that bank vault,' he tells me. An' he goes on to say that it's goin' to be there till the followin' Wednesday, when the president is to lug it up to the mint at St. Looey. Then he asks me how I'd like to get my feelers on half of that brick—an' a chance f'r a perfect, A. No. 1, absolutely clean getaway.

"Well, his description of that getaway appeals to me, me havin' been a State guest f'r the past few years account o' my last getaway bein' slightly impeded. An' his talk about a $5,000 haul instead of a dinky little one or two thousand-dollar job enlivens my spirits somewhat, an' stimulates my laggin' ambition as a peterman.

"So him an' me goes into the plan in detail—an' we cert'nly cooks up a pretty slick scheme. And this scheme, chief, around them unpleasant facts that a country bank is partly perfected by its location, in that immed'tly after an explosion the whole country can be secured by possies and all freight an' passenger trains telegraphed to an' searched. Yes,

(Continued on Page 12.)

Neuralgia
Neuritis
Sciatica, Etc.
CURED

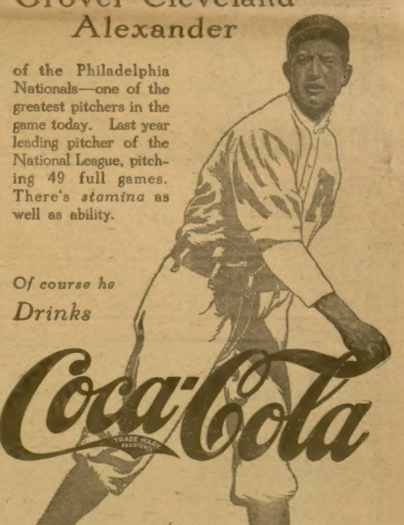
Free Trial of A New Method that Cures by Removing the Cause. Send No Money.

We've a new method that cures Neuralgia, Neuritis, Rheumatism, Sciatica, Neurasthenia, Tic Douloureux, etc., and we want you to try it at our expense. No matter how great your pain, or how terrible the torture you endure from diseased nerves, our method will bring prompt and blessed relief. No matter whether your case is occasional or chronic, nor what your age or occupation, this method should cure you right in your home.

The Mulhall Method does not contain a drop of morphine, opium, chloral, cocaine, acetanilid, or any narcotic whatsoever. It provides a nerve food that cures by removing the cause.

We especially want to send it to those so-called "incurable" cases that have tried all the various doctors, dopes, sanitariums, "opathys" etc., without relief. We want to show everyone at our own expense that this method will end at once and for all time, all those tortures and twinges of almost unbearable pain that are present in Neuralgia, Neuritis, Sciatica, Migraine, Tic Douloureux, Neurasthenia and other nerve diseases.

This free offer is too important to neglect a single day. Write now and begin the cure at once. Address Mulhall Co., Room 717 Brisbane Bldg., Buffalo, N. Y.



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of the Philadelphia Nationals—one of the greatest pitchers in the game today. Last year leading pitcher of the National League, pitching 49 full games. There's *stamina* as well as ability.

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Demand the genuine by full name—nicknames encourage substitution.

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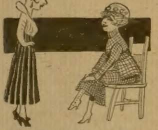


Belle—"But Freddie must have at least one redeeming quality."
June—"No! He ran the last one he had into a telegraph pole yesterday and now it's junk!"

Lead Soldiers.

"So you are playing with your soldiers, Willie?" said the caller.

"Yes, ma'am."

"They seem very heavy soldiers."

"Yes, ma'am. They're on their way home from the war and they've got a lot of lead in 'em."

Suspicious Character.

A bandit has no sense of shame.
Suspicions we avow
That since he tries 'most every game,
He's playing possum now.

Of Course.

"I'll never play poker with a palmist again."

"Why not?"

"Why, he could read my hands."

How It Happened.

Under the able superintendence of the twentieth-century builder, cottages and houses sprang up like mushrooms upon the new estate. But one morning the foreman rushed into his employer's office in a state of intense excitement.

"Please, sir," he gasped, "one of the new houses has fallen down in the night."

"What?" roared the builder. "You mean to tell me that one of my new, well-built, desirable villa residences has come to grief? How the dickens did that happen?"

"Well, sir," explained the foreman, "as far as I can make out, there was a little mistake. Unfortunately the men took down the scaffolding before they had put up the wall-paper!"

Pleasing Mother.

"Will you dance this dance with me?"

"Mother has forbidden me to dance with you."

"But she is out of the room."

"So it wouldn't be any fun. When she comes back I'll give you a dance."

No Place for It.

"I have plenty of grit," declared the grocery clerk, boastfully.

"No doubt," replied his customer, "but I wish you would find another place for it than in the sugar."

A Good Way.

"What can I say complimentary about this singer? His voice has a terrible beery sound."

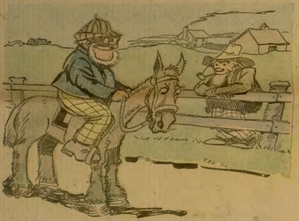
"Then talk about his liquid notes."

Contrary Reception.

"That speaker advocated a square deal."

"Yes?"

"And got a round of applause."



Hiram—"How's crops looking, Silas?"
Silas—"Well, I shan't advertise for a farm hand that knows all about an automobile—not this year, anyway!"

In Charge of the Man.

A Government inspector, entering a rural postoffice, expressed surprise upon seeing a woman at the delivery window. "I was under the impression," said he, "that a man was in charge in this office."

"And so he was," replied the woman sharply, "but I married him."

Going Slow.

He had just been accepted by the only girl in all the world.

"Does your father know I write poetry?" he asked nervously.

"Not yet, dear," she replied. "I've told him all about your drinking and gambling debts, but I couldn't tell him everything at once."

Used to It.

The man had been haled before the magistrate on some trivial charge.

"Let me see," said the judge. "I know you. Are not you the man who was married in a cage of man-eating lions?"

"Yes, your honor," replied the culprit. "I'm the man."

"Exciting, wasn't it?" continued the justice.

"Well," said the man judicially, "it was then; it wouldn't be now."

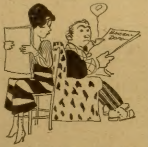
Bright Child.

"Bliggins' small boy says a great many bright things."

"He uttered his masterpiece the other evening in the presence of a large company."

"What was it?"

"He said, 'Father, where do you get all the funny things you tell people I say?'"



"It says here that another octogenarian's dead. What is an octogenarian?"
"Well, I don't know what they are, but they must be very sickly creatures. You never hear of them but they are dying."

Born Lucky.

First Coster—"Well, poor old Bill's gone."

Second Coster (scornfully)—"Poor, indeed! Luckiest bloke in the market. Couldn't touch nuffink wifout it turned to money. Insured 'is 'ouse—burned in a month. Insured 'isself again' haccidents—broke 'is harm first week. Joined the Burial Society last Toosday, and now 'e's 'opped it. I call it luck."

Talk That Isn't Cheap.

Client—"You have an item in your bill 'Advice, March 8, $5.' That was the day before I retained you."

Lawyer—"I know it. But don't you remember on the 8th I told you you'd better let me take the case for you?"

Client—"Yes."

Lawyer—"Well, that's the advice."

Not an Exacting Girl.

"Your love," he said, "would give me the strength to lift mountains."

"Dearest," she murmured, "it will only be necessary for you to raise the dust."

Its Style.

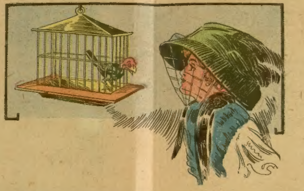
"I expect we'll have hot times at Jones' tonight."

"Why so?"

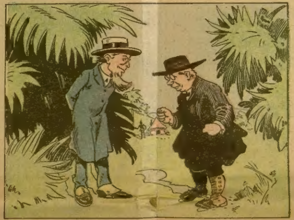
"He is going to give a house warming."

To His Credit.

"The chimney sweep never reneges," remarked the observer of events and things; "he always follows soot."



The Bird—"Hello! I see they have you in a cage, too."



Visitor—"You look a bit glum, Brother Perkins! Have you received bad news from home?"
Island Uplifter—"Yes. My rich Uncle Reuben is just deceased and has left all his money to these dodgasted heathen! Now they're better off than I am."

Looks Against Him.

"The new minister called upon the factory superintendent today."

"How'd he come out?"

"Boiling. The superintendent thought he was a man looking for a job and told him that he would give him a job in spite of his looks, if he could furnish first-class references and give bond."

A Fair Request.

"Could you give us a little of your time?"

"Yes; what do you wish?"

"It will take just about a minute. We want you to donate $1,000 to a charity fund we are raising."

"Take a little more time and ask for less money, won't you?"

Not Made.

In the early morn the fresh city boarder met the rustic dairymaid carrying a couple of foaming milk pails.

"Ah, good morning, my dear," he said, patronizingly, "how is the milk-maid?"

"'Tain't made at all, kind sir," she said. "We take it from the cows."

French Politeness.

As a truly polite nation the French undoubtedly lead the world, thinks a contributor to a British weekly. The other day a Paris dentist's servant opened the door to a woebegone patient.

"And who, monsieur," he queried in a tender tone, "shall I have the misery of announcing?"

Logical.

Kind Old Lady—"I'm sure you won't mind my asking you, but are you a relative of Captain Jones, of Mudford?"

The Officer—"Madam, I am Captain Jones, of Mudford."

Kind Old Lady—"Ah, then that accounts for the extraordinary resemblance!"

Boston Again.

A New Yorker, who recently returned from a visit to Boston, vouches for the truth of the following: One afternoon he found the 6-year-old son of his host settled in front of the drawing-room fire with a sheet of paper before him and a pencil clasped in his chubby fist. Stealing a look over the boy's shoulder, he saw that the little fellow was making pictures.

"Well, Bobby," he asked genially, "are you drawing an engine?"

Slowly the child looked up, and slowly he spoke:

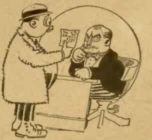
"It would take a very strong boy to draw an engine; but I am making a picture of a locomotive."

Friendly Inquiry.

"What are you doing now?"

"I'm in the freight service of the X. Y. & Z. Railroad."

"Ah! And how are things braking?"



Client—"I've just received your bill for getting me off in that assault and battery case the other day."
Mr. Bogus—"Ah, yes. Any further information I can give you about it?"
Client—"Yes; I'd like to know if I can change my mind and go to jail instead."

His Choice.

"His mother wanted him to become a minister."

"Just so."

"But his father hoped he would some day make a great deal of money."

"I see. What profession did the young man finally adopt?"

"He seems to have compromised. He's playing ministerial parts in the movies."

School of Education.

Hubb—"I just read an account of two girls getting lost in the Alps in midwinter."

Wiff—"Terrible! Were they frozen to death?"

Hubb—"No they warmed themselves on the mountain ranges."

No Wonder.

"I never came across a man so lacking in foresight as Jones."

"But you must make allowance for that. He used to be employed in the weather office."

But, Did He?

Patience—"Do you believe your doctor?"

Patrice—"Well, I don't know; I met him today, and he said he wished me well."

True.

"The world owes every man a living."

"That's so. And the world gives every man plenty of opportunity to collect if he wants to."

Money Talks!

Times are a trifle hard in the Cotton Belt just now, and money is a little scarce. Evidently Uncle Ephraim thinks so, for he came up to his supply merchant the other day and said:

"Marse John, times is tighter than I is ever seed 'em before. Do you know, Marse John, I can't get no money at all? No, sir, I can't get nuthin'! I can't even get hold of a nickel! Do you know, Marse John, hit actually looks like I'll have to go to preachin' in order to make a livin'. I done it once and I ain't too good to do it again!"

Dangerous Occupation.

"Well, Dinah, I hear you are married."

"Yassum," said the former cook, "I'se done got me a man now."

"Is he a good provider?"

"Yassum. He's a mighty good pervider, but I'se powerful skeered he's gwine ter git kotched at it."

Persistent.

"Be sure and get the right tooth, doctor."

"Don't worry. I'll get it if I have to pull out every tooth in your head."—Life.

No Wonder.

"I know a man who always charges cut rates for his work."

"Who is he?"

"The man who trims our trees and hedges."

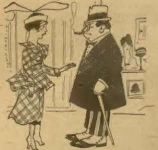
When He Approved.

"How do you like my new hat, John?"

"How much did it cost?"

"Three dollars."

"Most becoming hat you ever had on."—Judge.



Her Father—"Harold seems to have an exemplary character. I don't see why you say your marriage to him was a hideous mistake."
Mrs. Junebride—"It's just that. I married him to reform him and now I find that he never needed reforming."

Wealth's Handicap.

"A rich woman misses much in life."

"Why?"

"She can't run out to the back fence when she gets hold of a choice bit of gossip. She has to get up a tea or reception, and by that time the news is stale."

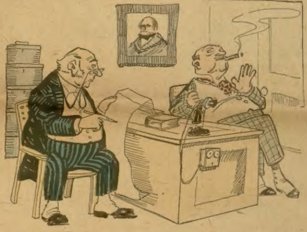
Love Is Blind.

Flatbush—"And he's married to that woman?"

Bensonhurst—"Yes. She is homely, isn't she?"

"I should say so. Where did he ever run into her?"

"In a fog, I guess."



The Client—"I understood you to say that your charges would be light."
His Lawyer—"I believe I did say my fee would be nominal; but——"
The Client—"Oh, I see; you meant phe-nomenal!"

Foxy Scheme.

"Tommy, if you'll saw some wood I'll tell you what I'll do."

"What's that, dad?"

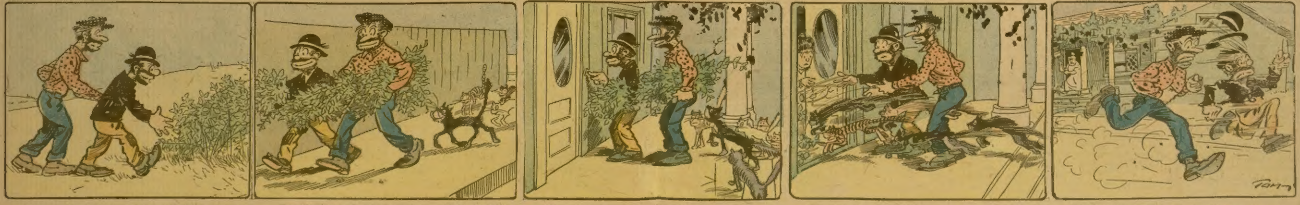
"I'll let you have the sawdust to play circus with."

Day-and-Night Clothes.

Ragged Rogers—"Dey say dat some Broadway swells never wears a suit more dan once."

Frayed Philip—"Well, neider do we—only it's a longer once."

A SAD CAT STORY



Hungry Heinie—"Hey, Slim, look at the catnip! I've got a dandy idea. We will take a lot of this catnip up to them rich people's cats and get some coin!

"Sure, there's a swell lookin' bungalow over there, and I can see a bunch of pedigreed cats thru the window! Oh, we will make a grand hit and get the money all right!

"When the door opens throw the whole bunch of catnip in and see the prize-winning kitties in there gleefully hop onto it! Gee, but the folks will be pleased!

"Thunder! Them blamed alley cats must have been follerin' us! Stop 'em, they're all goin' in after the catnip! Help! We're ruined!"

The Angry Madam—"Run, you white-livered cutthroats! I could murder you for bringing all these dirty alley cats into my house! I'll send the police after you!"

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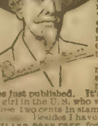

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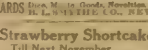

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The Michaux Z-Ray.

(Continued From Page 9)

[illegible] was the most beeyootiful part of [illegible] into the plans. I'm won-[illegible] I tell you how I pulled [illegible] I think, tho, that I'll just [illegible] the modus operendy.

CHAPTER XXIX

CHARLIE and me separates after two hours," continued McCracken, "with me all primed with the necessary dope [illegible] an' with Charlie arrangin' to have a good alibi when [illegible] explosion starts. I goes back up town, takin' a good look in the [illegible] store and sizin' up them black leather cases they have on sale. That night I stays right at the town hotel, keepin' my trap shut an' hintin' that I'm a sportin' man lookin' for th' gamblin' concessions at the comin' county fair. Next day—Tuesday—I stalls around the burg till evenin' an' puts in my time the best I can. And now for the stunt itself

"That night—or rather about 1 o'clock Wednesday mornin'—I [illegible] ats it in off the railroad tracks with my kit o' tools that I'd stashed. It wasn't no stunt at all to saw thru one of them rusty old bars on the rear window of the bank. In half an hour, just as I figured, I'm inside and ready to get to work. Of course, chief, I 'spose you've already doped out now that I don't blow that strong box with me on the grounds. If you haven't, you're pounding your finger instead of the nail head. For that was where the beauty of the scheme lay, you see. An' here's the way Charlie and me had patched her up. I was to use the combination that Charlie had slipped me, get the gold ingot, make my getaway on the blind baggage of the two o'clock St. Looey Flyer, an' have a phony explosion take place about an hour and a half [illegible] safe and sound a hun-[illegible]

"[illegible] that's what I done. With the [illegible]ation that Charlie had give me, the old vault door swings open as easy as pie. I routs out that heavy brown paper package. I eyes up that inner steel money receptacle pretty wistful; but after all, I concludes, what's the use of flirtin' with the rock pile for such a little additional amount of the kale?

"I makes my drill holes on the edge of the vault door, sets a fulminate cap an' a blast of soup, an' snips off as much slow-burnin' fuse as I figgered would take an hour and a half to burn up. An' after scatterin' the funnel an' them tools o' mine over the floor promiscuous-like, I makes my little exit thru the same window that I comes in at. Then I tiptoes down the alley o' that snorin' town an' waits in the shadow of the water tank f'r the two o'clock flyer bound t'ords St. Looey

"She rumbles up pretty soon, snorts a little, an' stands there puffin' while me and that ten-ton package is waitin' in the weeds. But when she gets her tank full of aqee poora an' starts off in th' night with a double toot, there's a new passenger wedged in between the baggage car and the tender. That passenger is little Luke McCracken

"As to what happens in Brownsville I has an opportunity of learnin' long after. The charge I sets goes off about three-thirty. Not more'n three minutes later the whole street is filled with shotguns an' rubes, all trippin' over their beards an' nightdresses. An' poor little innocent Charlie Vandersloan himself gets routed out of a imitation sound sleep by his landlady and her daughter, a-screamin' that the town's attacked by a furrin enemy.

"But of course when they scours the country they finds themselves face to face with a mystery. Where did the scar-chinned guy that had been bunkin' at the town hotel disappear to? And how had the guys who pulled off the explosion made such a miracklus disappearance, there bein' no freights after midnight an' no passengers after two o'clock in the mornin'? Some mystery, eh, chief?

"But it's a wonder they didn't sort of suspect something wrong, I'm thinking. F'r you see, gents, when I first swings open th' vault door I only spins back the combination f'r a notch or two, intendin' to throw her fully off after I fixes her up for th' phony explosion. But in blowin' out of there in a hurry so's not to miss connectin' with the two o'clock train goin' north, I fergets to take care of that matter, with the result that the door of the vault, blowed clear across the room, apparently shows that the gu[illegible] that turned the trick had pretty nearly struck the combination with a set of sandpapered finger-tips. In a certain sense that was sure a bonehead trick of mine, f'r it might have thrown a little suspicion on Charlie Vandersloan, him bein' one of them that had the combination.

"But now let me tell you what happens after I drops off the St. Looey Flyer on a steep up-grade about three-thirty in the mornin', and beats it off into a big patch of woods. I lays low till mornin', of course. Then I decides to take a little peep at that there famous brick of gold. I unwraps the paper, clips the wire with a pair of pliers, an' draws it carefully out of the leather. I opens her up, and so help me Gawd, chief, I finds some gold brick all right. Some gold brick, believe me. Why, that crook of a Vandersloan has hung me up for fair. In that satchel there's nothin' but a bundle of sticks of lead solder, tied together with string, just like you can find in any plumbin' shop.

"Say—maybe I don't carry on somethin' fierce. I raves around there to beat the band. For th' first half-minute or so I naturally figures that even Vandersloan himself hadn't known that a substitootion has been made. But a little cool thinkin' shows me just how the land lays. Either Charlie was afraid to trust me with the whole gold ingot—or else he's too blamed greedy to let slip a half of it.

"Oh, I tell you that was a raw deal! Me doin' all the dirty work, me gettin' my phiz telegraphed to all the bulls, an' him gettin' the swag. But I don't dare go back and bawl him out, you see, for who in blazes would believe that I'd been double-crossed? Why, I don't dare [illegible] snoot—or rather my chin—[illegible] lie. At the very best I might [illegible] dragged him into it—but the point of th' matter is that I'd 'a' got a new stretch of ten in the Missouri Big House. No, I sees durn quick if there's any rectifyin' of that dirty deal, any revenge, it'll have to be done by little Luke McCracken himself—and not by [illegible] courts

"So I'm kept dodgin' an' humpin' somethin' fierce durin' the next few days. Lucky for me I got a razor an' a shavin' stick, for I gets a chance to grow a cute little crop of fuzz over this here scar on my chin. And after things blows over a little I gets a job with an old German farmer who was too stingy to buy a newspaper. On the square, I don't believe he knows today whether or not the Kaiser's still President of th' German Republic

"I stays with that guy for six long months. To this day I believe he's chucklin' because he got hold of a 'bo an' made him work twenty-five hours a day for th' princely sum of fifteen bucks [illegible]. But that little job gives me what I'm lookin' for—a stake, an' a refuge for the time bein', since I don't dare to stick my nose in a city while the network's ready to tighten on me.

"Now I figures, of course, that Vandersloan with the original satchel which [illegible]'d took from the vault that Tuesday afternoon will lay low for anywhere's from six months to a year, an' that then he'll blow away from Brownsville an' proceed to cash in on the little prize that he'd double-crossed me on. An' I concludes that while I'm gettin' a stake, growin' a good bunch of black alfalfa on my chin, an' keepin' out of the clutches of the law for a few months, he'll be right safe to leave where he is.

"An' finally comes the day when little Luke, with a couple of brand-new fronts, a nice black beard, and a pair of plain specs made out of window glass, I guess, an' costin' him one dollar from a small-town eye doctor, blows into the town of Maryland, Missouri, a few miles south of Brownsville. An' when he gets off the train he's J. T. Peters, deaf mute, afterwards known as Dummy Peters, an' all ready to settle down as near to his good friend Vandersloan as he can with safety to himself

"Yes, Dummy Peters was me. An' if I do say it myself, I'm a good mechanic. Before I know it I'm workin' in the garage at Maryland in place of a mechanic what was sick. An' a month later I gets a chance to move on down to Brownsville and hook up to the Brownsville garage for the pleasant wages of $12 per week

"An' say, chief, did you ever try bein' an honest man? It ain't half unpleasant when you take a good fling at it. Why, say—I actually got in the habit of likin' work. An' I got to dreamin' of havin' a wife an' kiddies in time. But —oh, hell! I always recollects after a while that I'm Scar-chin Luke, an' that [illegible] the spinach an' the peepers off me I'm meat for any harness bull or dick that has a good memory for the 'wanted' mugs in the Police Journal

"But the nicest part of my new job, gents, is that I'm livin' in the same town with Charlie Vandersloan an' that he don't know it. I gets a chance to watch him, to hear all the news that concerns him, to get ready to fall in step behind him as soon as he concluded that it's safe for him to give notice and blow Brownsville—with Brownsville's gold

"[illegible] finally, along about the last of September—the [illegible] month—I hears the welcome news [illegible]shin' about the high-[illegible]and byways of Brownsville a great [illegible] way. Main street. Charlie Vandersloan, th' well liked cashier of the town bank, has give notice that he's goin' to [illegible] go East, an' take up a job [illegible]ner. And I realizes at last that [illegible] p to little Luke to kiss his job

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good-by and tackle a brand-new job—that of spottin' Vandersloan. For I knows what the officials of the bank don't know—that he's goin' to walk out of Brownsville with that 37-pound chunk of melted coin in his trunk or suitcase.

"Is anything secret in a little town, gents? Nix, I say. If a man sports a new pair of socks, ain't it in the town paper that night? Why, say—I lived for seven long months in that chloroformed dale where nothin' ever happened. An' six days before Vandersloan left Brownsville for th' East, it was known to even th' barefoot kids that he was goin' to leave on Thursday mornin' at 9 o'clock.

"So Wednesday night I trails up to Maryland. I stays there all night. I boards th' 8:45 northbound passenger next mornin', an' takes good care to lock myself in th' washroom when we gets near Brownsville. Sure enough, when the train pulls up at th' Brownsville platform fifteen minutes later, I hears the sound of a wheezy band tryin' to murder 'Bedeliar' or 'Annie Rooney' or some other up-to-date Brownsville tune. I takes a little peep out of the blinds of the washroom, an' there's Vandersloan, heavy suitcase an' fall overcoat in hand, shakin' hands with all the old settlers, an' boardin' the train, while the Brownsville band blows its lungs out."

CHAPTER XXX

M'CRACKEN changed his position a trifle and looked about him. Then he resumed his story.

"We reaches St. Looey at close on to noontime, me havin' rid in one coach an' Charlie in another. While I sits far back in th' waitin'-room of th' big Union Depot on Market street, keepin' my eye on Vandersloan, all he does is to monkey around the lunch counter, th' baggage-room, an' th' ticket office, where he shells out for a ticket to some place. I sends a kid over to get me a ticket—but not to no New York you can bet. For I dope it out that that guy is goin' to drop off the route somew'eres between St. Looey and the East. So all I invests in is a ticket to Chi.

"In a half-hour more both Vandersloan and me are on different coaches of the Chicago Daylight Special, bound for—well, I don't know yet, so I have to watch th' depot platforms mighty careful.

"But at this point, chief, I'm gettin' leary of that beard of mine. Vandersloan has seen me about town with that bunch of underbrush and them plate-glass glazers over my peepers, so I figures that if he happens to blow back in my coach he'll reccernize me for sure. But, on the other hand, he knows me as Luke McCracken w'en I'm wearin' a smooth face. An' again, while it's over a year now, there cert'nly was a time right after the Brownsville fake robbery that the police of all the big burgs was lookin' for Scar-chin Luke.

"However, I has to take the chance. I'm not goin' to step on Vandersloan's heels in shadowin' him—and so I don't need to be afeard of gettin' close enough for him to see that scar o' mine. An' as for the bulls, I figure I can afford to take the chance, because there's too many guys bein' looked for to be botherin' about old cases what had ought to be in ancient history by this time.

"So I puts the carcass of Dummy Peters into the hands of the train barber. Some class to them big railroads, eh, chief, with their liberries an' barbers, victerolios and manicurs? I slips him a generous retainer and slides back into Scar-chin Luke's mug once more. And now it's up to me to be leary of the dicks if we strike the big town. On the other hand, I don't have to bibble no more about that beard of mine givin' Vandersloan the tip that Dummy Peters is trailin' him.

"Well, he rides clear to Chi, an' bein' as the train is at the end of th' rails, he gets off in th' Canal street depot about ha'-past eight in the evenin. He stands in the depot waitin'-room, searchin' thru a newspaper. As for me, I stands clear at the other end, shiverin' in my boots and prayin' that he'll get out of that there place before some dick claps his paw on my collar-bone.

But after seven centuries—or seven minutes by the depot clock—he steps out on th' sidewalk an' flags an ancient Roman chariot with a driver who must 'a' been in the habit of usin' his nose for a headlight. An' me? Well, I'm up to date, so as soon as he rattles off I hurries out, takes a taxi, and orders the shuffer to follow that cab. An' say—at the rate Vandersloan an' his hearse was crawlin' along, I guess my taxi driver had all he could do to keep from runnin' 'em both down.

"We slides along thru th' Loop, over the Wells street bridge, an' north on Wells street. On th' way I catches sight of th' old Golden Rule Mission w'ere I once hung out durin' a cold winter in Chi, absorbin' soup, soap an' salvation. But we goes quite a ways beyond the Golden Rule Mission. In fact, we goes as far north as what I afterwards learns is Locust street. There we turns west an' suddenly I sees Vandersloan gettin out of his hearse in front of a dinky little white cottage.

"My own driver carries me on a block further an' stops. He sticks his head in an' whispers:

"Your cab's right back in the middle of that block, sir. Shall I wait here?

"But I pays him an' lets him go. Then I hotfoots it back on th' other side of the street, an' I'm just in time to see the old gazabo with the cherry beak snorin' in his seat an' Charlie Vandersloan enterin' the cottage with the number 213 over the door. After a while Vandersloan comes out under the arc light, pays off the old gent, goes back inside—and all gets quiet again.

"Now, I ain't quite sure, of course, whether he's answered an ad for a furnished room to rent, whether he's stayin' at a friend's house, or what. But one thing I does do. I walks up to a house across the way that was plastered up with room-to-rent signs like a prize battler's mug after a scrap, an' engages a nice little front parlor with a pair of dirty yellow lace curtains that hadn't seen th' washtub for two years. An' it's just what I'm a-lookin' for, gents, because I can sit there all day an' watch No. 213 Locust street without bein' spotted myself.

"Well, No. 213 finally darkens up that night. So I goes to bed. I watches the place all day Friday, an' all day Saturday. I keeps in readiness my little leather satchel an' its contents of a bunch of solderin' sticks that Vandersloan had palmed off on me a year before, knowin' that sooner or later I'll either have to clip him one over the bean, or turn th' trick of switchin' satchels on him altogether. He leaves the place empty-handed Friday morning an' comes back empty-handed Friday night. He leaves the place empty-handed Saturday morning an' comes back empty-handed Saturday night. An' me? Well, I'm gettin' impatient. I'm gettin' tired of dinin' on ham sandwiches an' delicatessen grub, too. It's a nice dark street is Locust, after you get away from the arc light in front of No. 213. If I could only get a peek of him walkin' away from there with that real gold-brick satchel, I figure I might take a chance an' slough him before he reaches the corner. But instead, I got to sit in that dirty room of mine, stewin', frettin', fumin', an' pacin' the floor.

"But Saturday night my nerves gets a fierce jolt—in two ways. I'm a-pikin' off that doorway of No. 213, tryin' to cook up some scheme of gettin' in there, and beginnin' to wonder if maybe that blamed ingot hadn't stayed at the depot baggage-room inside of Vandersloan's trunk, when the door of the house opens an' out steps Charlie with a little, square, wrapped package under his arm. An' in my nervous an' high-strung condition, gents, I fancies that he's leanin' rather heavy on one side. But as I looks back on it now, I'm wonderin if he wasn't doin' it for a stall of some sort.

"I loses no time in beatin' it out into that dark street. I catches up with him before he gets a block away. There ain't a soul in sight. With a blackjack I planks him one on the dome that lays him flat. An' while he's takin' the count I grabs up that there package and runs.

"But say—the minute I gets it under my arm I'm wise to the fact that I've made the most bee-yoot-iful bonehead play of my whole career. Why, that package don't weigh no three pounds, let alone thirty-seven or so. When I gets a couple of blocks away an' under an arc light, I rips it open disgusted, an' finds in it an old pair of kicks that he must have been takin' to a shoemaker to get half-soled, since the tips was O. K. and the soles was worn thru.

"But as I still stood in the street under this here corner arc light a-bemoanin' my fate an' cussin' myself, an' wonderin', too, whether Vandersloan would guess that his old friend Luke was tailin' him, I hears a whir an' a rush an' a honk. Then the world falls in on me an' forty thousand stars in the solar system bumps themselves square on my own dome.

"When I wakes up I finds I'm in the Henrotin Hospital on Oak an' La Salle. They tells me I was knocked out when an automobile with a party of joy riders in it, shootin' around the corner, slams me up against an iron trolley pole. An' it was Sunday noon. Well, I just takes the news easy an' philosophical like, for I knows that my g[illegible] crabbed for good by that bonehead play of mine. In fact, I figures that Charlie Vandersloan has long since come to an' skipped th' town. At 5 o'clock they hands me my duds and a passport, an' tells me I can go—bein' as I ain't hurt much nor no bones broke. I takes my time in pullin' on my things an' in walkin' back to the dump where I'd left my own suitcase an' the fake satchel.

"I gets in a little after dusk. I start to pack up my things. An' by gee, just at that minute—about a quarter to six to be exact—the house door of No. 213 opens up, an' out comes an elderly dame. But, chief, so help me if she wasn't totin' that same black satchel what I'd been movin' hell and earth to get my feelers on. Was that luck, eh? I don't try even to figure what it is, tho. Instead, I grabs my little duplicate out of my packed suitcase and beats it out after her, knowin' that it's a pipe to get a skirt rattled and switch satchels on her.

But then comes some more of my cussed luck. When I sneaks up to within a half-block behind her, on the same side of the street, a couple of young fellers falls in with her, one on each side, an' takes her arm. Then, by gee, they keeps her company all the way over to a little street called Scott street. Some fine chance I has to pull off my stunt with a mob like that hangin' around, eh, gents?

"Well, the two youngsters finally tips their hats at the corner of Scott and North State streets, and turns off north in the direction of Lincoln Park. So I makes one last desperate spurt to catch up with her. But, before I even cuts in two the block that separates us, she disappears in the doorway of a tony-lookin' joint with the word Devilsheart or somethin' painted on the lighted transom.

"So I'm left out in front a-kickin' myself an' wonderin' why in the devil she was fetchin' that satchel to this house, who she was, and what had become of Vandersloan. Maybe I'd walloped him harder than I thought. I crosses th' dark street an' stands in the gloom of an uncompleted buildin', watchin' the front of that there Devilsheart. An' first thing I knows, I sees a young feller that I can't make out very well look up from his newspaper, go to the door, and let in this here same elderly dame that I been trailin'.

"I don't lose no time. From that one lighted window I can see that there's a fire-escape clingin' to the front of the Devilsheart. So I figures that there must be one of them swingin' flights of steps leadin' to it from the dark inner courtway. I beats it cl[illegible] cuts across th[illegible] street, sn[illegible] to the Dev[illegible]heart an' inside [illegible]. By means of standin' on [illegible] old [illegible] I manages to catch the end of this same swingin' flight of fir[illegible] I'm expectin' to find.

"Good thing for me that [illegible] is bein' torn up so's to ch[illegible] old gas lamps to 'lectric lamps. An' a [illegible] thing, too, that it's this time of year an' a decent night to boot. For all that gives me plenty of darkness to work out my little scheme. I simply worms my way up that fire-escape till I gets to a few rounds below this here lighted window I been tellin' you about. An' then, as I'm crouchin' ag'in' the wall, strainin' my ears an' wonderin' if I dares to lift up a little higher an' take a squint in that room, I gets aware of a happy circumstance that makes the rest of my game a lead pipe cinch.

"Acrost the street, as I was tellin' you, is an unfinished buildin'. For some reason there's a big sheet of plate glass on the top floor, propped up ready to set in th' window frames. An' I notices right away that when I looks acrost the street from where I'm wedged on the fire-escape, I can catch th' whole reflection of what's goin' on in this room a little above th' top of my head. Why, gents, it's like seein' a show. I can make out the young guy, the dame, an' most of the furniture.

"Natchelly, I don't raise my nut any higher for a while yet. I just sticks there in the darkness and watches that movin' picture in the sheet of plate glass across the street. I sees 'em steppin' around an' gabbin' together for a long while, the sound of their voices comin' faint-like thru the crack at the bottom of the window. But finally, after what seems a year to me, I makes out th' reflection of th' young guy lookin' t'ord the wall, sayin' somethin', an' gettin' up. Then he leaves the room. So I begins to get my scattered wits together into some plan for kickin' in the window, pokin' the dame a stiff one in the jaw, grabbin' Vandersloan's gold brick, and beatin' it down to the street again. But I makes out th' reflection of th' woman lookin' at her hands, gettin' up from her chair, grabbin' off a

(Continued on page nineteen.)

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56	87	98	47	75	48	58	94	88	63	58	75	43
89	84	52	77	83	84	57	68	76	49	87	88	94
73	63	98	42	47	95	69	78	56	84	96	57	75
99	85	67	74	44	95	67	56	73	54	79	65	76
58	48	63	55	95	48	84	72	56	54	75	52	89
78	89	48	46	99	82	48	69	92	78	69	88	66
46	76	99	75	63	69	94	98	55	85	68	68	89
58	52	78	96	58	76	44	99	58	88	58	43	99
54	99	46	76	99	48	99	47	88	46	69	76	58
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You for Me When Sweet 16
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Black Horse Ben

Or, Liberty's Lone Scout

By Capt. Jack Judson

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Begun in No. 18, April 29. Subscriptions can begin with that issue or back copies can be obtained from news stands, our agents or by mail from office of publication.

CHAPTER X

THE struggle with the British dragoon threatened to put an end to Black Horse Ben's exploits, but suddenly the scene changed in a very unexpected manner. The black horse came to the rescue of his young master, for he seized the dragoon with his teeth and forcibly wrenched him loose from his victim.

The struggling redcoat was thrown to one side, where he landed in a clump of briers, and Ben, thus unexpectedly freed, sprang to his feet and was again in the saddle.

There were no further incidents to check Ben's career till he reached Marion's camp, where he delivered his message from General Greene.

"You have the thanks of the country as well as my own," said the Swamp Fox, in complimentary tones. "You have reached me at the right time, for tonight we are going to swoop down upon a detachment of Tarleton's command which is encamped on Merry River. You will go with us?"

"With my whole soul!" responded Ben, eager to see some real fighting.

At the approach of darkness Marion got his two hundred partisans together, and prepared for one of his eagle-like swoops which always proved so disastrous to the enemy.

Ben rode alongside of Marion, and the little band strung out along the shadowy road ready for battle.

Meanwhile Tarleton's men were making merry in their camp. They had no reason to suspect that a silent foe was stealing upon them, for they knew that Marion was miles away.

In the camp was a little band of Tories commanded by one of the most obnoxious men of that people. They did not get much encouragement from the dragoons, who had supreme contempt for a Tory, and they had to swallow the remarks which were made about them.

"I'd like to hang every Tory in the Colonies!" said Ormont DeKay, who had rescued Vesta from the rage of Gilford Gross. "They are too contemptuous to notice, and do our cause more harm than good."

"You are right," responded another trooper. "They generally spoil the pudding just when we are ready to enjoy it."

The command had thrown out pickets to guard the camp, and the silent figures were good watchers. They sat on their horses, hidden from view, and chatted in undertones about the war, which they hoped would soon come to an end.

When Marion's men reached a spot not far from the camp which was situated in a little valley between two wooded hills, they were divided into two parties so as to take the camp on both flanks. This was one of Marion's favorite tricks. But first the pickets had to be disposed of, and this was a ticklish job.

A number of the best men in the American command were detailed to rush the picket line, and Ben had asked and obtained permission to be one of the surprisers. The picket post consisted of six men, all stalwart fellows supposed to be always on the alert.

The pickets became visible in the moonlight, and the patriots, keeping in the shadows, came suddenly upon them. At their leader's command all rushed forward in a body, and before the British knew what was happening they had the eager enemy upon them. There was a clash of arms, and in a few seconds five of the six were prisoners of war.

DeKay made his escape, but not without being seen. Black Horse Ben spied the flying trooper and took after him, urging Comet to his utmost speed. It was more than a mile to the sleeping British camp, and the race was a merry one. It was a test of horse flesh that was splendid!

DeKay knew that everything depended on his reaching camp ahead of his pursuer, whose identity was as yet unknown to him, and therefore he drove his spurs into his steed with all his powers.

"On! On!" Ben cried to his horse, and Comet forged ahead, letting his young rider know that he was gaining on the foe.

At last the foamy horses came alongside, and Ben looked into the face of his enemy.

"Not yet!" exclaimed DeKay, drawing his pistol and turning half round his saddle. "This victory is mine, and——"

Ben, who had drawn his own weapon, knocked the trooper's from his grasp, and presented the cocked pistol at his head.

"Surrender!" he cried.

What else could DeKay do? He took note of the flaming eyes behind the leveled weapon and dropped his rein.

"I am your prisoner," said he, and the next moment, having recognized his antagonist, a smile flitted over his face.

"Well," said he, "we meet again. The fortunes of war have brought us together again."

"Sergeant DeKay!" cried Ben.

"At your service and your prisoner," was the reply. "You are with Marion, I suppose?"

"Fighting with the Swamp Fox, sir."

"You owe me release," continued DeKay. "Have you forgotten what I did for Mistress Gross?"

"I forget nothing," answered Ben, "but I cannot release you."

Disheartened over the failure of his plea, DeKay submitted to the inevitable and rode back with his captor.

"We're not such great enemies, after all," he remarked. "My heart was never in this war."

"You speak like a gentleman, sir, and right down glad am I to hear you say so."

In a few moments Marion received the captured pickets and met them in a jovial manner.

The little command, now reunited, prepared to charge upon the British, and at the sound of a bugle the enemy sprang up to find the partisans in their midst. There was sabering right and left for a few hot moments. The redcoats put up the best fight possible, and the cowardly Tories scattered like a herd of stampeded cattle.

"It was well done," said Francis Marion, when he counted up the spoil of conflict—eighty prisoners, a lot of muskets and some fine horses. "I guess Tarleton will grow frothy over our victory and seek revenge. But let him look to himself, for he is likely to become the next captive."

Guarding their prisoners closely, the Americans rode back, and Ben said to DeKay:

"The fortunes of war, Sergeant."

The man had grown morose.

"I don't thank you for it," he growled. "You deserve a captain's commission in the Rebel army."

"I'd sooner be the lone scout of liberty," was the reply. "It's jolly to ride by night over these hills and now and then do service for freedom."

"But you'll come to your end later on, my young fellow," said DeKay. "They'll double the reward for you, and it will have results."

Ben smiled at this and merely looked ahead.

The news of the British defeat spread like wildfire in all directions, and two days later, when Ben halted at a giant oak, he saw the fulfillment of DeKay's prophecy. A new "notice" had been posted on the tree, and fifty pounds reward for him dead or alive stared him in the face.

He smiled, and drawing a bit of soft stone from his pocket wrote beneath the proclamation:

"Rabbits are not skinned till caught."
"BLACK HORSE BEN."

CHAPTER XI.

THE swoop of Marion's little band spread consternation among British and Tories alike. It proved a source of general rejoicing among the patriots, and in consequence the Swamp Fox's army was recruited with ease, and Tarleton soon found himself confronted by a formidable foe.

Black Horse Ben soon discovered more offers of reward for him posted on the trees and elsewhere, and they warned him to be more on his guard. However, this did not prevent him from scouting thruout the Peedee district, and he furnished Marion and Greene with a good deal of valuable information.

"Greene will soon gain a victory over the enemy," he said, one night when he was seated before the hearth of one of the most prominent patriots in the Colonies. "He is getting ready to meet the British with a good force and Marion will join him in crushing out English domination in these parts."

"I trust you speak the truth," was the reply of the white-haired old man who was listening to him. "We must be free."

"We will be free!" exclaimed the young partisan. "King George must fail to subdue America, and in time we will not be under the hated British flag."

The words had scarcely left the boy's lips when there was a neighing of horses outside, and boy and man sprang to their feet.

"Dragoons!" cried a wild-eyed boy rushing into the room. "The redcoats are here!"

"Bar the door!" shouted the old man with flashing eyes. "I have sworn that no redcoats shall cross my threshold."

Ben sprang across the room and locked the door, and then placed a heavy wooden bar across it.

"How many are outside?" asked the patriot of the boy.

"I count a full dozen, uncle."

In a moment there was a heavy footfall on the porch, and then a heavy knock from the butt of a pistol.

"Open the door!" reached all ears. "Open in the King's name, or take the consequences."

"I will not open!" defied the patriot.

"Then we will force the door and hang every one who falls into our hands."

The heavy wooden shutters had been closed with the coming of darkness, and the enemy could not get a look into the house.

"We know who is with you, Master Holly. We have tracked Black Horse

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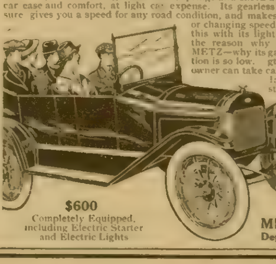

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Ben to your house, and we want the young rascal.'

"Let me surrender," said Ben, laying his hand on the old man's arm. "It will be the means of saving your life and property."

"N[illegible] shall not go from this house t[illegible] if I can help it," was the firm reply. "We will fight this raiding band in scarlet."

"Then be it so," responded the youth. "You have firearms in the house?"

"Six good guns in yonder closet."

Ben forthwith opened the closet door and arranged the muskets along the wall.

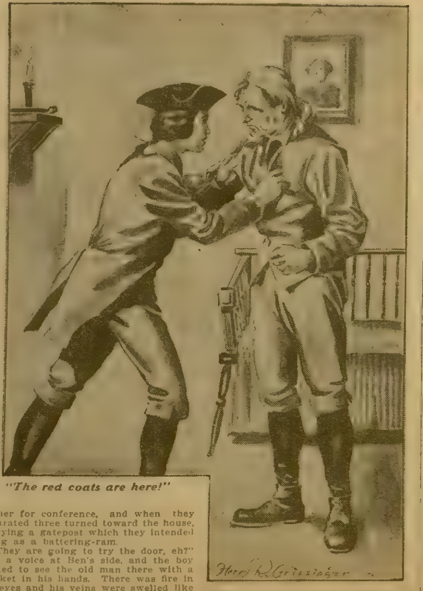
"Surrender!" cried the same harsh voice outside.

"We decline. If you want us you must take us at your risk," came the defiance.

The enemy seemed to draw back, for there was silence on the porch.

There was an upper story to the house, and Ben sought the upper windows for a survey of the situation. The frightened lad had spoken truly, for there were twelve men on horseback, all plainly visible. The odds were against the besieged, but there was pluck in the house, and woe to the men who would try to force the door.

The boy rider saw the dozen come together for conference, and when they separated three turned toward the house, carrying a gatepost which they intended using as a battering-ram.



"The red coats are here!"

"They are going to try the door, eh?" said a voice at Ben's side, and the boy turned to see the old man there with a musket in his hands. There was fire in his eyes and his veins were swelled like whipcords.

The lower sash of the window had been slightly raised and two firearms rested on the oaken sill.

"Ready!" spoke the patriot. "Now's the time. Fire!"

The two shots blended into one report, and two men who held the gatepost dropped it and fell to the ground. The other one stood dazed in his tracks.

The rest of the force fell back muttering cries of vengeance.

"Burn the nest," those in the upper room heard them say. "We are not to be defeated by two Rebels, one of them a mere boy."

The nephew had come up the stair with the remaining four muskets and placed them where they were wanted.

"Take one yourself, Billy," said the old man. "I have taught you how to shoot."

The boy, who was not more than 14, caught up one of the guns and joined his uncle and Ben. By this time the ten dragoons had withdrawn to a spot where they were sheltered by some trees. Suddenly one showed himself, and placing his hands to his mouth, shouted in stentorian tones.

"For the last time, surrender or have the house burned over your heads!"

"We will hold the house," was the reply.

The man withdrew out of sight.

"Can you ride?" Ben asked, turning to Billy.

"Yes, sir."

"I saw a bugle hanging on the wall in the room below."

"It is mine."

"And you can play it?"

"I have learned all the military commands for the bugle."

"Good!" exclaimed Black Horse Ben. "We will try a trick on the King's men. You and I, Billy, will run to the stable where the horses are and take them out. Then we will blow the 'charge' and ride at the troopers."

"I like that," the boy replied, with bulging eyes. "I can blow the 'charge,' for one of Marion's men taught me how to do it."

The house shielded the two on their race for the stable, and in a few moments Comet and another horse were brought out and mounted.

"We must get into the rear of the foe," cautioned Ben. "You know the best way, Billy. Come!"

A rapid ride brought them behind the troopers among the trees, and there they drew rein.

"Now blow the charge, and at them we go!" Ben cried.

In another second the battle charge sounded loud and clear, and the two horses plunged forward.

"Down with the redcoats! Marion and liberty!" rose from Ben's throat in clarion tones. "No quarter for the minions of King George, the tyrant!"

The ten dragoons, taken by surprise, heard the cry with amazement. Ben and his comrade fired straight into the dark mass which was discernible at the side of the road. There was a hasty scampering of hoofs and a few pistol shots rattled thru the night air. Billy reeled in his saddle, but clung bravely to the rein.

"Marion and freedom!" rose again from Ben's throat.

It was too much for the British. They scattered like a pack of wolf-charged sheep, each man for himself, and soon not a redcoat was in sight.

"Well done," said Ben, as he rode back to the house supporting the wounded boy in the saddle. "You're going to live," he went on. "A brave boy like you will live to see Washington's flag the only one in the Colonies."

"I—hope—so," came the feeble answer.

When Billy's wound had been dressed, and he was sitting pale-faced in the candle light, he looked at his friend with a smile.

"They thought we were Marion's whole army, eh, Ben?" said he.

"That they did, Billy. If two boys can rout ten of Tarleton's best dragoons, what can't the Swamp Fox's whole force do?"

"They could whip Cornwallis," was the smiling rejoinder.

The remainder of the night passed without a renewal of the little battle, and when daylight came the only redcoats to be seen were the two lying on the ground beside the intended battering-ram.

"It was a pretty little fight," laughed Black Horse Ben, as he prepared to leave. "The rascals may come back and catch you napping, Master Holly."

"They may not find me here. But what have you there, Billy?"

The lad had a paper in his hand. Master Holly took it, and after a glance handed it to Ben.

It contained instructions from Tarleton of the utmost importance to General Greene, and Ben pocketed it, saying he would take it at once to the patriot general. Billy had taken it from one of the dead dragoons. It was of the greatest importance, as our concluding chapter will show.

CHAPTER XII

"THIS information is indeed valuable," said General Greene to Black Horse Ben, when the latter had handed him the paper found on the body of one of the redcoats slain in the attack on Master Holly's house. "Colonel Tarleton is going to throw his whole force between Marion and me, and this paper will enable me to forestall the doughty Colonel."

Forthwith Greene moved his camp to another place, and sent the young partisan to Marion with an important message.

Gilford Gross' house [illegible] and Black Horse Ben [illegible] ing Vera, the Tory's ward, determined to halt there a few moments. He timed his arrival at the hour of dusk, and drew rein not far from the place, leaving Comet concealed in a thick wood near by. Mistress Vera received him with gladness, but he saw a look of fear in her eyes.

"They have raised the reward for you," said the girl. "I saw the new notices this morning."

"Yes. They seem determined to get me by hook or crook," was the answer. "Colonel Tarleton is very much chagrined over my escape from his camp, and the King's Friends whom I plundered at Hawes' shop are equally anxious to get their hands on me."

"All of which should make you doubly careful," warned Vera in anxious tones.

"It is time for me to ride on," said Ben, rising. "It is many a good mile to the Swamp Fox, and General Greene is planning a swoop that will gladden the heart of every patriot if it proves successful."

The door opened at that moment, and in strode Gilford Gross, whose eyes

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seemed about to fly from his head at sight of Black Horse Ben. However, the Tory smothered his anger and crushed himself into a chair.

"You've been doing some pretty tricks of late!" he said, looking Ben squarely in the face. "Don't you know that your end is coming soon?"

Ben's face did not change.

"I know they want me pretty bad," he remarked, stealing a sly glance at the girl.

"And it is no wonder," growled the Tory. "A few more pests like you and there will be no more British victories in the Carolinas."

"All of which I am pleased to hear from your lips," Ben said in tantalizing tones.

"You are not wanted in this house."

"I am aware of that, and I was about to leave when you came."

"You will not go yet!" cried the Tory, changing his voice and at the same time jerking a pistol from the drawer of the table near which he sat.

A cry died on the girl's lips.

"Sit down!" commanded Gross, snarling at the young scout. "If you do not I will scatter your Rebel brains about the room."

Ben noted the flashing eyes behind the cocked weapon and silently obeyed.

"You see I hold the best cards," continued the Tory, with a savage grimace. "I am expecting my old friend Colonel Tarleton every moment, and, by the way, he isn't likely to be alone."

Covered by the weapon, Ben could only look into the merciless eyes of his captor, and he feared to glance again at the girl who stood against the wall with a blanched face.

"You fought the King's men at Master Holly's house," said Gross, after a brief silence.

"Yes, and we whipped them, too."

"It was a fatal resistance for you, sir. It has aroused Colonel Tarleton, and——"

At this moment certain noises were heard on the porch of the house, and the door was flung open to present to all in the room the figure of the famous Tarleton in full uniform.

"Just in time, Colonel," exclaimed Gross. "I have the honor of presenting to you Black Horse Ben, who has given us more trouble than a regiment of armed Rebels."

Tarleton's face colored, and Ben saw the delight that lit up his eyes. He executed a mock bow to the boy, who looked him fairly in the eye and maintained silence.

"This is a pleasure totally unexpected," the Britisher said. "Really, Master Gross, you have performed a valuable service."

"Are you alone, Colonel?" asked the Tory.

"I am a little in advance of my escort," was the reply. "Being eager to reach your house, I have ridden ahead."

As he finished, Tarleton turned to the boy ranger.

"I rather admire your cunning," said he, with the semblance of a smile on his lips. "You have given me a great deal of trouble, and it is my duty to put a stop to your work."

There was no reply.

"I will wait till my escort comes up," Tarleton went on, crossing his legs. "No doubt you have started out on a night ride. Well, I promise you that you shall have one."

All this time Gilford Gross held the cocked pistol in Ben's face, and the boy could not take his eyes from it.

"And how is Mistress Vera?" suddenly inquired Tarleton, casting a look at the pale-faced girl.

"I am quite well, your excellency," was the reply.

Tarleton fumbled in one of the pockets of his waistcoat and drew forth a small gold watch which he held in the lamplight.

"Permit me to present you with a token of Colonel Tarleton's esteem," said he. "I am sure this little object will look well on your fair bosom."

Despite herself Vera blushed, but she came forward with a singular look in her eye. Before Gilford Gross could take notice, she had thrown herself between him and the boy prisoner, and was holding out her hand for the watch. Ben instantly saw thru the girl's intention.

All at once he leaped to his feet and had drawn his own pistol before Gross and Tarleton could prevent him. A bound carried him to the door, where he halted with the weapon in his hand.

"Ill luck to you, Colonel Tarleton!" cried he, looking at the redcoat Colonel. "I must be off. It is high time for Black Horse Ben to be again on the road."

With a curse Gross staggered to his feet, but the boy's pistol was moved till it looked into his face.

"One step and there will be a dead Tory in this house!" Ben said coolly. "Raise your arm and you are a dead man."

The Tory did not move.

"Now good night, Colonel Tarleton. If I could get you to your horse there would be a famous prisoner by daylight in Marion's camp."

"Really you wouldn't subject me to that indignity," smiled Tarleton.

"Wouldn't I?" ejaculated Ben. "But your turn will come some other time."

With this the boy vanished, and finding Tarleton's horse outside, he hurried with him to where he had left Comet and threw himself into the saddle.

In another moment the two horses were flying down the road, the big bay carrying Tarleton's handsome pistols and private papers.

"I couldn't bring the Colonel with me," the boy said to Francis Marion, some hours later, "but here are his celebrated horse and his trappings."

The thin face of Marion broke into a broad smile, and he was profuse in his congratulations.

"You've surely brought me something," he exclaimed, when he had examined the papers found on the horse. "General Greene and I can now count on certain victory."

A few days later Greene and Marion gained an illustrious victory over the British, and much of it was due to Ben's last exploit. The enemy was so signally defeated that he never again sought the field against the Americans in the Peedee district.

Not long afterward Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, and the Colonies were triumphant.

"Well," smiled Black Horse Ben to Vera, after the war, "I didn't ride for nothing."

"That you did not," was the reply. "But you rode in the shadow of the noose all the time."

There came a time, when Ben became a man, that he rode one day to the home of Gilford Gross, and in the room where he had made his last escape from Colonel Tarleton, a little ceremony was performed which promised to throw sunshine upon his future years.

There were no more night rides along the Peedee, no more dodging the redcoats, and Comet had been turned out to graze unmolested after his gallant deeds, for the Colonies were free, and no redcoat cast his shadow over the land.

In next week's Ledger you will find another splendid boys' story, "On the Big Drive; or, Glen Dayton's Fortune," by Milford Merrill, author of "Riding the Logs," and "Glen, the Boy Pilot." It is all about Glen Dayton's adventures in the lumber regions. Be sure and read it.

The End.

* * *

Irritating Sounds.

"I don't see," said Chinnert, "how any one can be so immodest as to play the cornet right in an open window three feet from a thorofare where pedestrians are passing up and down! And especially in warm weather when there are so many people sitting on porches and balconies, and when everybody's windows are wide open.

"A man might just as well sit on his front porch or in his front yard playing the cornet as in an open window. It would be just as modest and retiring.

"But in regard to sounds you cannot turn away your ears. You simply have to hear. Then, why should a man be allowed to expose his music to the public ear, a thing that certainly should not be paraded and the exposure of which modesty forbids?

"There is that infernal cornetist, Vubbs. The sounds which he turns loose are vile, but he doesn't care. There he sits by the window, puffing and working away to produce those noises.

"He has a sheet of music before him and tries to make people think that the music sheet calls for the crude sounds that he emits. But he doesn't fool anybody. No such wretched sounds were ever indicated by black notes. There is nothing like them in the whole gamut of noises.

"Now, last night I finished my dinner early, so that I would have a chance to talk to that lovely little Meringue girl. But hardly had I seated myself on the steps and prepared to look at her appropriately when the cornet fiend emitted a note of sickening derision, which turned my expression of dramatic intensity to one of sheeps' eyes and dying calfishness.

"The cornist then gave vent to a succession of sounds that took all the romance out of life. The girl began to look silly to me instead of beautiful.

"That man must play his music backward. All the effects music is supposed to have he reverses.

"If music be the food of love, then that stuff of Vubbs' must be the poison of love. It couldn't pass a board of censors and should be forbidden, accordingly."

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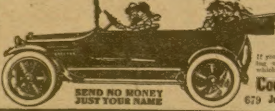

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GENTLE JABS

The rolling stone isn't a mossback.

The best poker hand is made up of calling cards.

Ambition is the thing that boosts a man up the ladder.

It's easier to get a bad reputation than to keep a good one.

Even a little miss may make a big hit when she grows up.

If you have a skeleton in your closet get busy and nail it up.

Judicious use of "soft soap" has prevented many a black eye.

Don't borrow trouble; almost any one will gladly give it to you.

Most of the world's heroes dwell between the covers of novels.

A good job can easily dodge a man who has a lame reputation.

It is better to be run down by a chauffeur than by an evil tongue.

The leap-year girl still has plenty of time to look before she leaps.

Sometimes a man's friends work overtime in attempting to work him.

A shiftless man is always boasting of what he would do if he had the money.

A shrewd man is waiting at the door when he expects opportunity to knock.

When a man quarrels with his wife he seldom gets a chance to say anything back.

There were female matchmakers thousands of years before matches were invented.

Many a loafer thinks he is killing time, but time continues to do business at the old stand.

It's the easiest thing in the world for a woman to manage a man—if she isn't married to him.

As a matter of fact the sins of a large city haven't anything on a country village—if the truth were known.

The average woman worries more about her complexion than she does about her prospective harp and crown.

A woman says a man is only half a man until he gets married. Yes, and even then he is seldom the whole show.

Making a million dollars looks comparatively easy to the man who has been trying to get a crying baby to sleep.

If we ever attempt to paint a picture of Cupid it will look more like a girl with a fish net than a boy with a bow and arrow.

When a mother begins to tell her children how smart their father is, they look at her as reproachfully as if they thought she was losing her mind.

Home and Health

FASHION NOTES.

Not for many seasons has the separate coat held such a high position in the realms of fashion as it does today.

As summer approaches one casts aside the simple serge frock and dons the silk dress, which possesses so many desirable qualities for warm-weather wear.

The tailored girl is more conspicuous than ever. The furbelows are passing away, and the smart tailored suit and sailor hat are worn almost exclusively by those who know. Linen suits are extremely smart, and are to be worn this summer very extensively. Pongees are also good.

A picturesque summer model looks for all the world like little Bo Peep's frock, but this year it is made in pale blue serge de soie and white organdie, and is for the picturesque type of girl only. The sleeveless, close-fitting bodice of the silk laces with black velvet ribbon under one arm to the hip, where it holds the skirt, bunched up in rustic fashion. A short white organdie petticoat veils an under petticoat of rose. The guimpe of white organdie is simple, with a childish, round collar and long bishop sleeves.

❧

NEEDLEWORK NOTES.

There are so many lovely things that a girl can make from handkerchiefs that she should not despise these offerings when they come as gifts even if they are the plain hemstitched variety.

For instance, she might follow the example of one clever miss who had four hemstitched and embroidered handkerchiefs given to her, too pretty for the use for which they were intended. She laid them out before her on her bed, making a large square of them, and suddenly the idea occurred to her to join them together with strips of lace and edge the whole thing with val edging. This she did, leaving an opening in the square where the sides of two handkerchiefs met and sewing lace on each side instead of joining them together with one piece. Then she threw the pretty thing about her shoulders, never even cutting a neck line, and the cunningest short negligee was the result. A few ribbons at the neck and under the arms to hold the jacket on made it prettier still.

But the funny part about it was that while she was making this negligee, several other ideas for using handkerchiefs came to her. That afternoon at a mussed handkerchief sale she picked up three plain linen handkerchiefs with narrow pink borders—her room was "done" in pink—and at the next table a piece of fine torchon lace which looked almost like cluny. A dressing table scarf was the result.

Then one time a new baby came to town in the cottage across the way and the girl wanted to give it some little dainty thing. She remembered her handkerchief experiences, and rummaging thru her treasure box she brought to light a fine embroidered glove handkerchief which she turned into a square yoke for a small frock. This pleased her so much that she used a second handkerchief almost like the first to make a turned back band on a small baby cap, cutting the handkerchief in half and using each half for the band, which separated at the top of the cap.

She discovered the value of handkerchiefs for making aprons, boudoir caps, bibs, collars, jabots and many, many other pretty articles where the tedious part of the work is apt to come when raw edges have to be rolled or hemmed. This "the handkerchief way" does away with.

❧

RECIPES.

RICE AND MEAT CASSEROLE—Boil a cup of rice. Line a buttered pan with the hot rice. When cold fill the center with chopped cooked meat of any kind. Season well. Add gravy. Set in pan of water and bake half an hour. Turn out on a dish and serve with tomato sauce.

TOMATO SAUCE—Take two tablespoonfuls of butter, two tablespoonfuls of flour, one teaspoonful of salt, a sprinkle of cayenne pepper and one and one-half cupfuls of tomato juice. Melt butter until it bubbles, add flour and seasoning, and stir until smooth, then add tomato juice and stir constantly until it thickens.

NEWFOUNDLAND DUFF—Raisin pudding: Two cups flour, with one teaspoonful of soda sifted in it, one-half cup suet chopped fine, one cup raisins, one-half cup of sugar, one-half cup molasses, one-half cup milk, or more if needed, one teaspoonful salt, all kinds of spices. Boil three hours.

MOCK MAPLE SIRUP—One cup of white sugar, two cups of brown sugar, one and a quarter cups of boiling water. Boil three or four minutes. When cool add one teaspoon of vanilla and put into jars. This is fine with griddle cakes or hot biscuits.

❧

FOR THE HOUSEWIFE.

To prevent cakes, pies and puddings from scorching place a dish of water in the oven.

Do not pile leftover cooked potatoes together, as they will sour quickly. Spread them out on a large dish.

To make linen look like new when ironing it, do not starch, but wring out of hot water and roll in dry cloth and let lie for a half-hour; iron with a good hot iron until thoroly dry.

Here is another suggestion for the woman who spends a good deal of time in the kitchen. A raw potato cut in half and rubbed on the fingers stained with vegetable parings will remove the discolorations.

When you suspect that your cooking has been scorched because you have neglected it for just one moment too long, lift the vessel holding the food quickly from the fire and stand it in a pan of water for a few minutes. In almost every case the scorched taste will disappear.

A little trick which goes a long way toward the satisfactory serving of rice is the use of a fork rather than a spoon. When cooking, the rice should never be stirred with a spoon, but with a fork; when serving, where possible use two forks instead of a spoon. The spoon crushes the delicate particles and gives the rice a mushy look which should always be avoided.

❧

HEALTH NOTES.

When the eyelids are inflamed and red they should be bathed several times a day with a solution of weak boracic acid and water.

Warts on the thumbs can be removed by tying a piece of rather heavy white sewing silk firmly around the base of the wart. This cuts off the nourishment or blood supply and the wart will die and drop off. Be very careful to keep it clean and dip the silk in pure grain alcohol before using.

If you can become addicted to the morning cold bath habit it is a good thing; if the treatment is too harsh do not attempt to force yourself to become used to it. If after the plunge or shower there is a feeling of reaction and exhilaration, it is excellent and a valuable tonic to the body, but unless there is a decided sense of glow this form of tub is harmful.

❧

RULES FOR SANE LIVING.

External inactivities cause internal sluggishness. In the past to cure sluggishness of the system medicines have been used. But today scientists of all schools recognize the fact that medicines do not remove the cause of the trouble. Sane living and proper exercises and diet remove the cause and remake the troubled one.

If you wish physical vigor and health, if you wish mental power, if you wish to radiate vitality and keenness of body and mind not only for the way it makes you feel but for the way it makes you look and makes others feel, for the efficiency of service it places within your power, and if you cannot find the time to get out of doors and indulge in good, sweat-producing, muscle-stretching games and sports, then take the only other alternative and exercise at home each day. Give five minutes to health and it will be surprising how soon the results will begin to tell. After a week of exercising regularly the exercises will become as necessary to your comfort as your bath or tooth brush. The day of the liver pill is past; Nature is the great doctor of today. If you follow Nature's dictates you will not only be well but you will find that your personality will improve with your health. You will have found the Fountain of Charm.

❧

BREAKING DOWN.

Apparently the most significant result of the various changes in our living habits is found in our declining power to resist the strain of life on the heart, arteries, kidneys and the nervous and digestive systems, remarks Science. Compared with past decades, the increase in mortality from the early breaking down of those organs is very marked. The records of the last census show that the increase continues in the younger as well as the older age groups. This points to the shortening of the valuable productive period of life. These indications are well attested. They cannot be disposed of by the easy process of denying the statistics without investigation. Nor can the extraordinary increase in cancer be explained in this convenient way. The early breaking down of these important organs points to a decline in the vitality of our people in the mature and most useful period of their lives, and presents a phase of the problem meriting the most careful study and consideration.

❧

Interested Parties.

Heiress—"We'll have to postpone the wedding."

Suitor—"I don't know that we can. I must ask my creditors."

RECIPE FOR LEMON PIE.

Mix one and one-fourth cups of sugar thoroly with one-third of a cup of flour and a little salt. Grate a little of the rind from a Sunkist Lemon and mix with the juice of the whole lemon, and add to the sugar. Beat three egg yolks well, stir in a scant cup of water and blend carefully with the sugar and lemon mixture. Pour all into a pan lined with flaky pie-crust (preferably a pan that is perforated or made of wire), add a tablespoon of butter cut into bits, and bake in moderately hot oven.

Make a meringue of three egg whites and half a cup of powdered sugar, with a teaspoon of lemon juice. Heap onto the pie (after baking) in large spoonfuls and brown slowly. Serve when cooled.

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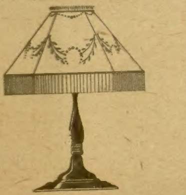

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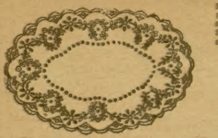

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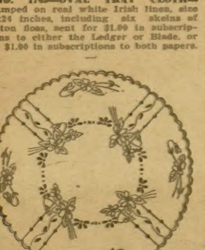
NO. 1749—OVAL TRAY CLOTH—Stamped on real white Irish linen, size 18x24 inches, including six skeins of cotton floss, sent for $1.00 in subscriptions to either the Ledger or Blade, or for $1.00 in subscriptions to both papers.



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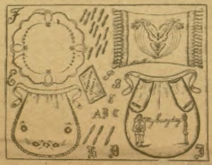

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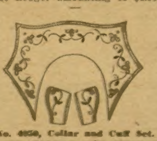

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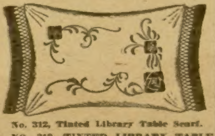

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* * *

Joys of solitude have nothing in common with a lone dollar bill.

The Michaux Z-Ray.

(Continued From Page 13.)

towel from a wooden ring, an' goin' out of the room. After which I sees the door closin' behind her.

"Pipe, eh, chief? I stands up on that fire-escape platform, pulls up that window—an' oh!—such a wailin' an' squeakin'. But I steps in quick, takes that satchel off th' bureau, an'—just to make matters interestin' for some one—I leaves the phony black satchel containin' the lead solderin' sticks that Vandersloan had palmed off on me over a year before.

"I pulls down the window and slides down that fire-escape in a hurry. I——"

"And there, McCracken," shot forth Callahan, pointing an accusing forefinger at him, "is where you're lying for the first time in your story. This woman—Mrs. Hunter—returned while you were in the room. You struggled with her. You——"

"No, chief," broke in Jarrick, calmly. "You're on the wrong tack entirely. McCracken has told the truth. Mrs. Hunter met her death after he went down the fire-escape!"

Further chapters of this highly interesting story will be found in the Ledger issue of next week. Read it. If you are not a regular subscriber to the Ledger we would like to have your name on our list. The Ledger is only $1.00 per year.

* * *

The Poppy Girl.

(Continued From Page 3.)

struck me and I could not forbear answering in a spirit of levity.

"I presume," I said, "that if it comes to a choice between the two vocations, I am a smuggler; at least no one ever has gone so far as to accuse me of being a real author."

Five minutes later I was alone, and the captain's key had grated in the lock of my stateroom door—from without.

Further chapters of this highly interesting story will be found in the Ledger issue of next week. Read it. If you are not a regular subscriber to the Ledger we would like to have your name on our list. The Ledger is only $1.00 per year.

* * *

Neutral.

"Are you a pro-German or a pro-Ally?"
"Neither. I'm a Pro Bono Publico."

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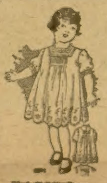
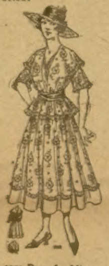
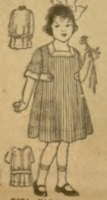


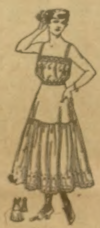
8876 Child's Dress, 2, 4, 4 and 6 years.



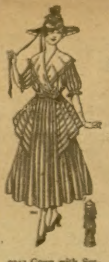
9052 Dress for Misses and Small Women, 16 and 18 years.



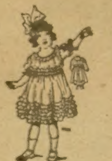
8874 Child's Box Plaited Dress, 4 to 8 years.



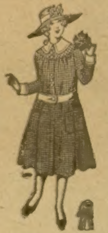
[illegible] Combination Undergarment, Small 34 or 36, Medium 38 or 40, Large 42 or 44



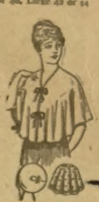
9013 Gown with Surplice Blouse, 34 to 42 bust.



9038 Child's Dress, 4 to 8 years.



9059 Girl's Coat, 8 to 14 years.



[illegible] Dressing Jacket, One Size.

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